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“UNDOUBTEDLY,” I ASSURED HER. “THAT’S WHY WE ARE ALL SO EAGERLY DOING OUR BIT HERE”

ESMERALDA
OR
**EVERY LITTLE BIT
HELPS**

BY
NINA WILCOX PUTNAM

AUTHOR OF "ADAM'S GARDEN," ETC.

AND
NORMAN JACOBSEN

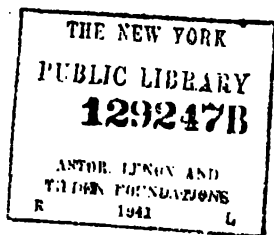
*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
MAY WILSON PRESTON*



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DEDICATION
TO
MARY JACOBSEN
AND HER WORK

5790

ILLUSTRATIONS

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ESMERALDA

OR

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How much ought one to stand from one's relatives? That was the real question at the bottom of the whole affair. Answer me that, and answer it fairly, and I am sure you will feel that dear Mrs. DeWynt was justified in what she did. You will perceive that the girl was altogether too difficult; and lifting all blame from my dear patroness will place it where it belongs. But first you must know the facts. And I, owing to my position as social secretary in the DeWynt household, was rather in a position to know them as they really were.

People in our set have talked and talked—you know what a Long Island colony is; and, now that the worst is over, I feel it my duty to clear my gracious patron's name. Not that there was ever really any blemish upon it; no, indeed! Mrs. George Everan

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DeWynt, wife of the famous Republican senator, *grande dame* in a fashion that can only be acquired through at least three London seasons, leader of Long Hampton's most exclusive circles—such a person, in short, as my dear patroness can scarcely be said to be in any wise blemished, no matter what happens to her! Still, it must be admitted that things seemed a little queer; the girl was her niece, and Mrs. DeWynt was undoubtedly responsible for bringing her on from the West—insisted upon doing so, I might add, in spite of my warning. But the simplest way of doing the dear lady justice is to tell the story, exactly as it occurred, from the very beginning; which was, of course, the moment when the unfortunate idea occurred to her.

We were sitting on the west terrace, I remember, and Mrs. DeWynt had just finished authorizing the invitation list to a bridge drive we were having for the benefit of the Red Cross. I had prepared the list with great care and discretion. Of course, the guests were to

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pay an admission fee, which was to be turned over to our local branch; but, even so, it was well to choose the right names. Not too mixed to be exclusive; yet not too exclusive—if you know what I mean. There are so many shades of social standing, aren't there?

And in any affair of this sort one has to send out notices with an eye to what people are willing to pay to meet whom, and who will stand being met—if you understand me. I've always flattered myself on having a peculiarly sensitive finger on the social pulse—and dear Mrs. DeWynt says it made me the most valuable social secretary she ever had. Of course, a convenient and always available extra man at dinner may have had something to do with the warmth of her estimate; but one doesn't mention those things—at least, not among us.

Well, at any rate, Mrs. DeWynt had just authorized the list, and I stood waiting for the idea I intuitively felt was coming. Mrs. DeWynt is rather large; indeed, if she was a person of less social importance she would be undeniably fat.

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As it is, she is avowedly reducing; which fact disarms comment. Still, ideas come to her rather slowly, and I might almost say visibly. As this idea formulated she tapped the arm of her chair slowly, the magnificent Morton diamond showing to great advantage on her well-cared-for hand. At length she spoke.

“Allie!” said she—short for Aloysius—her playful way—years ago we had got beyond the Mr. Penny stage, though of course she will always be Mrs. DeWynt to me—“Allie,” said she, “all this charitable effort we are making in connection with the war is giving me a vision of—of larger things—things even beyond our widespread horizon. Since we have been knitting and going regularly to roll bandages on Thursday mornings, and more particularly since we have been doing such earnest work—like this bridge drive of ours——”

“Yes?” I tactfully broke in, giving her the opportunity to catch her breath.

“Yes, yes?”

“——it makes me feel that I have not,

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perhaps, always done my duty right at home in my own family."

She completed her statement with a sigh. Of course, I hastened to try and disabuse her mind of any such absurd idea; but she waved my protests aside imperiously.

"No, Allie; no!" she said. "I have been too concerned with my own interests. I cannot but feel that undoubtedly there are things I have left undone—and one of them is my brother Charles' daughter. Allie, I have decided to have her on from California. Write her, Allie—it's some wild place called Flower City, I believe, where my poor brother raises—er—horses." The sweep of her magnanimity was such that I ventured a mild protest.

"But, dear lady," said I, "you have never seen her! Can you be sure that she is quite——"

"She's my brother Charles' daughter!" said Mrs. DeWynt.

And, of course, I was silenced; but not convinced, mind you—not convinced. Somehow I knew, from the

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moment of writing the necessary letter, that something dreadful would result from it. But in due course I wrote Miss Esmeralda Sprunt of her aunt's generous offer, explaining, as that lady had desired me to, what a wonderful opportunity it would be for her—Miss Sprunt—to do her bit in war work.

After the shortest possible time the reply came, accepting in a somewhat stilted style. It was written on very strange note paper—lined note paper, headed Homestead Ranch, Flower City, California—in a firm, clear hand. My heart misgave me when I beheld that paper; it was of a sort that never comes into the hands of a secretary who is secretary to anybody who is anybody—if you know what I mean—except in the form of appeals for gratuities from persons one never sees; from the underworld, where the importance of good form is hardly understood properly. So it was amazing that a niece of my dear patroness should have made use of such epistolary furnishings. The letter was

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brief, however, and merely said that the young lady would be glad to accept her aunt's invitation to come East and join in the war activities, and would be with us one week from that date.

I fancy this was a rather more prompt appearance than dear Mrs. DeWynt had anticipated, for we had a very full house at the time. The senator was at home, for one thing; and with him was Mr. Worthing Willy—the Mr. Willy of the American Purchasing Board. And we had Captain Basil Tugwell, of the Royal Argyle Highlanders—Lord Castlewing's cousin, you know—who was over here to purchase supplies for the British Government, and who had been especially invited for my patroness' niece, Miss Marjorie DeWynt. Also, there were Mr. and Mrs. Bobby Lennett—the Virginia Lennetts.

Mr. Willy was very important, because of his position; and we were anxious that he should be pleased. In certain ways he is a crude personality—rather short in his manner; and, oh, so painfully American! Not that I intend

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to be unpatriotic, what with the war and all; but you know what I mean—so unfinished, but of great value to the senator.

And Captain Tugwell was important for three reasons. First, because he was Lord Castlewing's cousin, which fact automatically carried certain social obligations; and secondly, because he was young, possessed, I believe, of a considerable competence in his own right, and, according to some tastes, very handsome. Personally I thought the latter supposition debatable. He was tall and slim and blond, and wore an absurd little mustache. I have never been able to raise a mustache myself; but as I do not consider hirsute ornamentation hygienic this is no loss. I am a small man, but I flatter myself that my clothes are in rather better taste than Captain Tugwell's. It seemed indeed strange that so taciturn a young man should be given to wearing such extremely loud tweeds.

I may here mention that he possessed

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one suit of clothing the checks of which were fully half an inch in diameter. This costume appeared to be a favorite of his, as he wore it upon every possible occasion when not in uniform. It was noticeable, to say the least; but, being who he was, Lord Castlewing's cousin—did I tell you?—of course, it passed. I speak of it particularly, as it figured rather conspicuously in what followed; which you will observe.

The most important fact about Captain Tugwell was that he was unmarried. And, of course, every mother in our set had his marrying—and marrying right—very much at heart! This good office my dear patroness had taken upon herself; and, though, of course, such a subject was left unspoken of, I am morally certain she had decided that Miss Marjorie DeWynt would make him a suitable wife. And, as Mrs. DeWynt's decision on a matter is usually the final word, we regarded Miss Marjorie as good as engaged to the captain, a view which that young lady seemed not averse to sharing.

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Captain Tugwell himself seemed curiously obtuse on this delicate subject. Perhaps it was due to his nationality—or possibly to the fact that he had enormous orders to place for his government, and that the fact absorbed him largely. At any rate, he was marvelously impartial in the bestowal of his attentions and treated all the younger women in our set about alike; but this did not dampen their enthusiasm. It is indeed strange how mere beauty can attract the weaker sex, even when clad in outrageous Scotch tweeds; for there can be little doubt, particularly in view of his subsequent behavior, that Captain Tugwell was a man of by no means great intellectual caliber. Indeed, from the very first I considered that, though his social position was undoubtedly superior and his physical qualities more—more developed than my own, mine was and remains the superior mind!

However, to get back to this tale. Such, then, was the situation that was, as I may say, *au courant* when Miss Es-

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meralda Sprunt's letter came; a rather busy moment for us all, as you will perceive. The hour of her train's arrival was an additional complication. She was due at a quarter after seven, which, with the drive from the station, would not leave her above fifteen minutes in which to dress—for we dine at eight, and, on the night of her arrival, were having a dinner given in honor of Captain Tugwell.

The dinner was to be small—only twelve covers—and had been carefully planned for the very cream of the colony. So you see how extremely awkward her arrival at that particular moment was—making thirteen; upsetting the menu cards—I had secured some especially charming ones, of which there were, alas! only exactly a dozen procurable, which were all made out in my very best manner; and further necessitating a change in the scheme of table decoration by forcing me to abandon the red Venetian liqueur glasses in favor of plain engraved glass, which we

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use only for large affairs. I was really quite annoyed and had to plan the whole effect over again. The most distressing point, however, was the question of a dinner partner for her.

“ We might have old Colonel Brice,” I suggested on the busy morning when her answer—which I had not dared to show Mrs. DeWynt—arrived.

Mrs. DeWynt was personally superintending the midday meal of Taki and Whaki, her prize Pekingese dogs. Their maid was carefully cutting their chicken into small bits and feeding it to them a piece at a time, and dear Mrs. DeWynt was watching with the greatest interest. She is so kind to animals! But my suggestion did not meet with her approval.

“ No, Allie!” she said with that instant, firm decision which has gained her the position she holds to-day. “ No, Allie! Colonel Brice is a bore. The others wouldn’t stand him. We’ll have to have somebody no one will notice. I’m afraid you’ll have to come to the table yourself!”

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And so it came about that on the night of Miss Esmeralda Sprunt's entrance into the *grand monde* I was present to witness that amazing occurrence.

What a beautiful setting for the entertainment of the aristocracy of America Mrs. DeWynt's drawing-room made when we assembled there on the fatal evening! The great room glowed richly in the subdued lights; and beyond the, as I may say, serried rank of French windows the Atlantic boomed softly. It was a perfect night; and the lawn, discreetly lit with lanterns, rolled like a piece of hatter's plush to the edge of the water. Within, all was the essence of gayety. My dear patroness was superb in a Paquin gown that made her positively girlish in appearance, or would have done so if possible—if you know what I mean!

The Senator was there, too, and Mr. Willy, very imposing and less plebeian in evening clothes. There was Marjorie DeWynt, delightfully sophisticated, as always, taking her second cock-

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tail with Captain Tugwell and laughing her well-known silvery laugh. There were the Ted Collinses; the Bobby Lennetts; Winnott St. Johns, who won the dancing tournament, you know; Miss Jack Bennets; and Mrs. Langdon, who was down here getting her new divorce. It was a gathering of which anyone might well have been proud to be a part.

The moment for the announcement drew near. Mrs. DeWynt was showing Jack Bennets and Winnott the fine points of Taki and Whaki, who, with their turquoise collars on, were at the feet of their mistress. But of the new guest — of Miss Esmeralda Sprunt — there was as yet no sign, though we knew her to be in the house. I could see that my dear patroness was displeased; but, with her usual marvelous graceful tact, she concealed the fact, except for a slight tapping of one slipper, and went on discussing the dogs.

All at once Taki gave a yelp, followed by a growl which Whaki echoed, and both doglets stood erect, bristling

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and glaring toward the door, while Mrs. DeWynt shrank back in alarm. Every eye followed those of the little animals. There, framed in the hangings of the doorway, stood a girl; and beside her was a creature I at first supposed was a dog. Esmeralda had arrived!

CHAPTER II

FOR a long second she held the center, of, as I may say, the limelight; and I do verily believe that during that period she was the least perturbed person present. Let me say at once, her personal appearance was such that I give you my word I did not for several seconds even notice her outrageous costume. She was a tall girl, but so well-proportioned that this was not a disadvantage; and the very first thing one noticed was her hair. It was red, a peculiar coppery red, and lay about her face in smooth waves. It was one of those heads of hair which hairdressers often try to mimic with their art, yet seldom succeed. So far, so good. As to hair, she was as well groomed as any woman present.

Below this a pair of level eyes looked quietly at the company. There was

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something disconcerting about those eyes, even from that distance. When I came near her I discovered that this was not due to their color, which was indescribable, or really to the eyes themselves, but to a little brown mole which grew at the outer corner of her left eyebrow and gave a curious quirk to her expression, as if she were ever so slightly amused all the time. It was a fearfully contagious suggestion.

Her complexion was naturally white, but exposure to the weather had colored it a pale gold, which blended into the fine hairs on her forehead in a fascinating manner. Beautiful? Well, dear Mrs. DeWynt never thought so; but for once we were not altogether of the same mind. No one could deny that it was a striking face, at any rate.

But her gown! I shudder to remember it! Could such an atrocity indeed be fitly so described! For here, into the midst of a company of women who knew how and did accordingly, was introduced that which I can only feebly cata-

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logue as an eccentric sports costume. It was immaculately neat and clean; but, aside from the fact that it curiously became her, that was the best which could be said for it.

The blouse, or upper portion, was of white silk, open at the throat, about which was loosely knotted a large, man's-size handkerchief of pale blue silk! The lower portion was a skirt of dark corduroy; and on her feet were the most impossible shoes!

It was as simple a costume as a servant might have worn; yet no one would ever have mistaken her for one. Beside her, close at heel, stood the object that had roused the ire of Taki and Whaki—poor little darlings! It looked like a large rough yellow dog—a rather pathetic dog, because of the coarse hair over its eyes; a very common beast, at any rate, but apparently as unconscious of anything being wrong with itself as was its mistress.

During the instant that followed her dramatic appearance the creature

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scented—I presume it was scented, a vulgar term though necessary at this point—Taki and Whaki, and started to investigate. At this, Mrs. DeWynt, who had been fairly frozen by the apparition, came to life and gave what, in a person of less breeding, would have been a squeal.

“Take that creature away this instant!” she screamed, batting at the animal with her large purple ostrich-feather fan. “Take it away!”

“Here, Jeff!” said a cool voice from the door. “Heel!” The thing went to her at once; and the smooth voice continued: “You need not be afraid. Jeff never hurts cats unless I sick him on them!”

Cats! Mrs. DeWynt’s famous thousand-dollar Peeks had been taken for cats! There was another instant of horrified silence, on which the girl’s clear voice broke in again.

“Which is Aunt Sally?” she asked simply, looking directly at Mrs. Langdon, who backed off a step or two al-

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most into the arms of Mr. Willy, who, in turn, beat a quick retreat.

Then my dear patroness, whose given name, as a matter of fact, is Sarah, did the most heroic thing. In the face of disaster to her carefully planned dinner, in the midst of that awful silence, she made a supreme effort, gathered herself together, and advanced upon Miss Esmeralda with a dignified manner.

“I am Mrs. DeWynt,” she said with remarkable composure. “I presume you are Esmeralda. And I must really ask you to remove that—that common animal!”

“Oh, but he’s not a common animal!” said Esmeralda quickly. “He’s quite rare, in fact. You see, he’s half coyote and half dog. But if you don’t want him of course I’ll take him away. Excuse me a minute.”

With which she gathcred the great ugly creature up in her arms and disappeared. A faint buzz of conversation arose in her wake, but it was fear-

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fully artificial. The only person who did not trouble to try to cover the painful situation was Captain Tugwell, who kept silently staring at the curtains, between which Esmeralda presently reappeared, a trifle breathless, but smiling a dazzling smile.

“It’s all right!” she said. “I locked him in my room. He won’t mind. He always sleeps with me! I’m so sorry about him, Aunt Sally, and that I’m late for supper. I’d have been down sooner, only I thought as there was company I’d better wait and wash up first.”

It was awful! Marjorie gave her well-known silvery laugh, a little off key, or, as I may say, falsetto. Mrs. Langdon suddenly began talking to the senator about modern Spanish art in a rather hysterical manner. No one was quite at ease during that terrible moment except Mrs. Collins, who seemed rather to enjoy it. Odd woman, that Mrs. Ted: always seems a trifle amused.

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She never takes things quite so seriously as the rest of us.

And now I instantly felt that she had ranked herself with the newcomer. Somehow I also felt an inclination that way—something beyond my control urging me, despite my strong sense of loyalty; for, though Miss Esméralda was overwhelmingly without the necessary social equipment, there was that about her which drew one irresistibly. But it was Mrs. Ted who really rescued the situation. She came forward with outstretched hand, and smiled.

“I consider that was very thoughtful,” she said. “And really you’re not late, after all. Here is dinner just going to be announced this minute.”

Then mercifully Hoskins appeared in the doorway, and somehow or other we trailed toward dinner. Movement eased the strain we were all under; and, indeed, Mr. Collins and Mr. Willy, both of whom are usually a trifle heavy at dinner, seemed, for some mysterious reason, to take a new lease of life.

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But when we reached the dining room fresh difficulties arose. To begin with, Hoskins, who is usually the pink of exactitude in such important matters, had misread my plan for the seating, and by the most unfortunate error Mr. Willy was placed on the other side of Miss Esmeralda. This brought Captain Tugwell directly opposite, though still beside Marjorie. Thank heaven! Dear Mrs. DeWynt can never blame me for having blundered there!

At first things went really better than might have been expected. Miss Esmeralda, though not in the least abashed by her surroundings, was frankly absorbed with interest in them. There was no question but that the entourage was an entirely unfamiliar one, and her curious, indefinable eyes moved deliberately from object to object. Hoskins and the second man, Brent, seemed particularly to fascinate her, and during the *hors d'œuvre* I do believe she followed their every movement.

Because of the war we were serving

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very simple meals. And on this occasion we had a strictly four-course dinner—not counting the caviar—just a clear soup, suprême of chicken, alligator-pear salad, and one of our chef's own marvelous ices—the Senator always will have a sweet, though they are so fattening for dear Mrs. DeWynt.

But this simple menu made no appeal to Miss Sprunt. It is to be presumed that at home they have buffalo ragout, or something of the sort. At any rate, she ate almost nothing; neither did she talk. But the light played on her red hair in a singularly attractive fashion when she moved her head in that deliberate way she had, and somehow one almost forgot the incongruity of that awful white shirt waist. Her silence was not that of discomfiture; indeed it made our chatter seem rather noisy. I have several times read that these Western aborigines are given to silence, owing to the larger spaces in which they live, and where, I suppose,

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there is no one to talk to; hence the habit.

I sat between Mrs. Ted and Miss Esmeralda, and several times Mrs. Ted leaned across me to speak to the girl, who replied quietly and briefly. Had she enjoyed her journey? Yes, thank you; though the train was rather cramping. It was her first trip East, of course. Yes, Mrs. Ted loved Florida, and supposed California was like it. Miss Sprunt did not know, but rather supposed in the negative.

I volunteered a few exact figures as to climate, and so on, in the two places; and then silence fell upon us three. The rest had been talking of bridge and golf, and who among their acquaintances had commissions, and the smart look of English uniforms, the stock market, and Betty Treusdale's divorce — the usual sort of chatter. And then Captain Tugwell said something across the table to Mr. Willy.

“I say, Willy,” said he, “are you getting the horses you need?”

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“ I seem to be having trouble getting what I want for artillery,” replied Mr. Willy.

Instantly I could feel Miss Esmeralda become, as I may say, alert.

It was a curious thing the way she unconsciously conveyed the fact of her interest without either moving or speaking. It was as though an electric current had suddenly become active in her.

“ I expect you won't get them easily,” said Tugwell. “ We didn't at home!”

“ But,” protested Willy, deeply engrossed in his salad, “ I positively must have them, you know. The Government can't be put off indefinitely.”

“ Well, I expect they will have to wait,” replied Captain Tugwell, “ unless you have exceptional people buying for you. That's what you need—straight people to do the actual buying. Then you may get the animals.”

“ I haven't got enough of the sort of people I'd like,” Mr. Willy admitted; “ but I am determined that my horses shall come up to government specifications.”

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“Have you got all six of them yet?” asked Esmeralda suddenly.

“Eh?” said Mr. Willy, leaving the salad long enough to give her a sharp stare.

“All six!” repeated Captain Tugwell. “What on earth do you mean?”

“That there are not over six horses in the United States which come up to those requirements,” said Esmeralda. “I know where there are three of them.”

“Where?” demanded Mr. Willy. “Between ourselves I haven’t found one yet!”

“There’s a man named Saul Collett, in Blackfoot, Idaho,” said Esmeralda. “He owns one of them.”

“Is that a fact,” said Mr. Willy, “or are you joking?”

“I’m not joking,” replied Miss Sprunt—“except it’s rather a joke to get the Government any horses as good as they want. But the D. Up and Down Ranch, near Flower City, has one.”

“Where’s the third one?” asked Captain Tugwell.

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“ In Lebanon, Oregon,” said Esmeralda promptly. “ Man by the name of Childs.”

“ And are the requirements so impossible, really?” asked the Englishman.

“ If they are the right color.”

“ And what color are these three?” asked the captain.

“ Camouflage,” said Miss Sprunt briefly.

“ Camouflage!” repeated the captain incredulously. “ What do you mean?”

“ Black or brown,” said she. “ Don’t show at a distance. White or buckskin is no good. You can see ’em too easy!”

The entire table was listening by this time. Marjorie had a distinctly annoyed expression; and no wonder. The situation was getting frightfully out of hand. Nearly all the men had stopped talking to listen to the conversation. Mrs. DeWynt did the only thing possible—she seized, as it were, the horse by the bridle; at least she could guide it—if you see what I mean.

“ And so you ride, my dear?” she

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commented, thankful, no doubt, that this strange young niece had at least one approved taste. "And so you ride? That is delightful! Marjorie rides too. You will enjoy going together."

Marjorie did not seem thrilled at the prospect.

"Do you ride—er—bareback?" she asked acidly.

"Why, I'd rather have a saddle if you can spare it," replied Esmeralda politely. "Even a packsaddle!"

There was a laugh. Mrs. DeWynt pulled on the curb hard. This was impossible. She arose.

"We shall have the coffee on the terrace," she said.

At that instant Esmeralda was listening intently to some remark of Mr. Willy's about the government prices, and so did not at once perceive the signal. I, pitying her simplicity, ventured to touch her arm. She saw, then, and hastily got up, first carefully folding her napkin!

"So's I can come again!" she said, quoting the childish superstition.

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Of course, it was I who held back her chair; but somehow—I cannot yet see how, for he had been quite on the other side of the table—when she dropped her handkerchief, a perfectly astonishing large silk one, it was Captain Tugwell who restored it to her.

He did it very gravely, having abruptly relapsed into his habitual silence, but he looked straight at her, and somehow I could not but feel that something was said, though I'm certain no word was spoken. Then Marjorie distracted him with the reminder of some engagement and the ladies left the room.

Though I admire the good old English custom of leaving the gentlemen to their wine and am glad to say that it is maintained at the DeWynts, still I always prefer to leave when the dear ladies do, as I am not a partaker of alcoholic stimulants; and this evening I made no exception to the rule. Besides, I had a feeling that I ought, as it were, to watch over Miss Esmeralda — she having been put into my charge by Mrs.

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DeWynt; and you know how women are to a newcomer who doesn't quite fit in.

As soon as we were in the drawing-room I realized that my judgment had been good. Mrs. Langdon got the crowd round her and began telling a story of which the liqueurs had reminded her; and Miss Esmeralda was soon standing alone, looking over a pile of Raemaeker's cartoons.

"Are these things true?" she asked me as I approached.

"Undoubtedly," I assured her.

7 "That's why we are all so eagerly doing our bit here. One must do something about it."

She drew a long breath and her eyes seemed to narrow down to pin points of light.

"Do something about it?" she said.

"Do something! Then I'm glad I came after all."

At that moment the group about Mrs. Langdon began to scatter, as the ladies gathered up their knitting.

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“This is my eleventh helmet,” said Mrs. Langdon plaintively. “I’m so tired of them!”

“Why don’t you do socks for a change?” asked Mrs. DeWynt.

“Too difficult,” murmured Mrs. Langdon behind her cigarette. “Soldiers have to walk on socks, but it doesn’t matter how many knots are on their heads.”

“Wool is so expensive!” exclaimed Jack. “I can’t afford to do many more things. Winter’s coming on and I must have a new kolinsky stole.”

Mrs. Ted, who was knitting a muffler—the very simplest and easiest garment of all—came over to Miss Esmeralda, with an attempt to draw her into the circle.

“Don’t you knit, Miss Sprunt?” she asked. And indeed Miss Esmeralda was the only idle woman present.

“No,” said she.

“Don’t knit!” exclaimed Mrs. Langdon. “Why, everybody knits! I do, in the car; even in the theater. I can do

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it and see quite a lot of the play, as well, now!"

"Why, everybody knits, everywhere, Alice!" said Mrs. Lennett. "Don't boast! The dear rector's wife knits in church now, I hear. You simply must knit, Miss Sprunt!"

"Oh, she'll knit before I'm through with her!" said my dear patroness. "I've promised fifty sweaters by October, and I simply must get everybody to do at least one. It's only two months, you know."

"Two months!" exclaimed Esmeralda. "Why don't you get a knitting machine? You could make fifty a day, then."

There was one of those awkward silences she had such an unfortunate knack of inducing.

"We are not running a factory," said Mrs. DeWynt. "Besides, these are handmade."

"But don't the handmade ones stretch badly?" asked Esmeralda. "I

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thought the machine ones lasted so much better.”

“ I don’t know anything about machine-made things,” said Mrs. DeWynt coldly. “ Besides, I thought you wanted to do your bit!”

“ I do,” said Esmeralda in a suddenly subdued tone. “ I do; but I can’t knit. Besides, a machine seems so much more practical.”

“ But the spirit counts for such a lot!” exclaimed Marjorie in her sweet, womanly way. “ See! I’m just learning to purl, and I know I do it horribly; but I’m sure that the sailor who gets this will appreciate that an American woman did it for him.”

“ You must learn—really!” added Mrs. Lennett. “ It’s easy, and everyone does it.”

“ What other war work is there here?” asked Esmeralda. “ I may be able to do something else.”

“ There’s the Red Cross, my dear,” said Mrs. DeWynt, warming to her pet subject. “ First aid—bandages and lint,

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you know—every Thursday morning regularly. We all go. Positively no one has bridge on Thursdays any more.”

“Oh!” said Esmeralda.

“And then there’s the diet kitchen,” Mrs. DeWynt went on—“to encourage people to use corn and barley, and such things, you know.”

“I’m afraid I can’t cook, either,” said Esmeralda.

“Why, my dear child, of course you don’t have to know how to cook!” exclaimed her aunt. “We just have the things in jars—the various grains—and a model kitchen, with the newest, most economical utensils for cooking them properly.”

“And we put on the most becoming aprons and take charge on alternate hours on Fridays—give out leaflets, and all that, don’t you know!” Jack took up the theme excitedly. “I love the ducky little white caps! And really quite a few people come in and taste the samples that the state sends in.”

“Oh,” said Esmeralda again, “I sup-

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pose there are plenty of people to do that!"

"It's very popular," said Mrs. Langdon; "so near the club, you know."

"And that's not all," added Mrs. DeWynt. "There are the gardens. We've had such a lot of preserving done. And, of course, we are all economizing on our tables."

"I'm not!" announced Mrs. Langdon abruptly. "I've given up the fight. I'm willing enough to economize; but my fourteen servants are not."

"That's true!" exclaimed Mrs. Ted. "Goodness knows that since I've been reducing I don't eat fifty cents' worth a day. I'm sure I don't. But the servants aren't dieting."

"And if you try to make them observe the Hoover rules they simply leave!" complained Mrs. Lennett. "What do you do in the West, Miss Sprunt?"

"Sometimes we have one Chinaman," said Esmeralda. "And he does as he's told!"

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There was another uncomfortable silence.

“ Well, we’ll find something for you to do your share of,” said Mrs. DeWynt comfortably. “ I’m certain learning to knit will come easy to you.”

I don’t think Esmeralda said anything to this, but a cloud seemed to settle down upon her. The friendly smile, which had been so eager when she came, had gone, and her face wore a grave, quietly troubled look. I suppose it was rather hard on her, realizing how little fitted she was to take up the work the other women were doing, to feel her own ignorance and incompetence.

Mrs. Ted had been watching her face for several moments, while the conversation became general on subjects to which she — Esmeralda — was a stranger. Then she joined her. I hardly think it was intended that I should overhear the extraordinary remarks of the lady, but my proximity at the moment made my doing so inevitable.

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“Don’t be too hard on us,” said Mrs. Ted in a low voice. “We’re doing the best we know how; we just don’t know much, and anything more difficult would terrify us.”

She shrugged her shoulders expressively. Esmeralda said nothing.

“I like you,” Mrs. Ted went on. “Don’t let them smother you here. Stay yourself. I was smothered; but I like to do the thing that’s easy. You’re a fighter. But if ever I can do anything for you let me know.”

“Thanks!” said Esmeralda abruptly.

And that was all; but quite enough, when one thinks of it. And Mrs. Ted was so very much one of us too!

CHAPTER III

AT the end of a week Miss Esmeralda's outward appearance had become notably modified. The men had all gone to town and so dear Mrs. DeWynt was able to devote practically all her time, outside of her war work, to making her niece presentable.

The first thing to attend to, of course, was her clothing. On examination it developed that she had brought only another corduroy skirt, a much-stained one—for ordinary wear, she explained; a silk party dress, of baby blue, with imitation lace trimming—which she declared she did not care for and had bought only at her father's insistence; and a pair of crude high boots, such as a cowboy might wear.

As she was evidently not in the least ashamed of this rudimentary wardrobe, it is to be presumed that a horse ranch makes comparatively few demands in the way of feminine apparel. But, of

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course, with us it is vastly different; and the first thing dear, generous Mrs. DeWynt did was to get her some new frocks. My patroness informed me afterward that her niece was prevailed upon only with great difficulty to accept this gift, and that she—Mrs. DeWynt—was convinced that Esmeralda could not comprehend why her own things would not do. She was horrified at her new garments' cost and protested about that too.

“Allie!” said Mrs. DeWynt, during a confidential résumé of the situation, “Allie, I cannot think how my brother Charles ever permitted it! Of course, he is not rich; but still —— Such ignorance! Do you know, the child actually wanted me to let her go on with just her atrocious clothes and give the money for the new ones to the Red Cross! Of course, I explained that if we didn't buy as usual all those poor working girls would be thrown out of employment—so particularly dangerous to them in wartime too!”

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“Of course, that settled the matter!” I exclaimed.

“Not quite,” replied Mrs. DeWynt. “But I finally persuaded her to accept a few things—though not what I should have liked, especially in the matter of evening gowns. She said: ‘Very well, Aunt Sally—I mean Aunt Sarah; but I think the girls would be much better employed making munitions to cover the Front than dresses to uncover my back!’ So vulgar and pointless!” She sighed heavily; and indeed she was under no light strain.

However, as I said, Esmeralda’s appearance did improve in her modish raiment. But when we had persuaded her to wear it our difficulties had just begun. So far and no farther was she willing to go, until Mrs. DeWynt almost despaired of imparting to her the customs of civilization.

To begin with, she detested the limousine and was forever wanting to walk. Of course, she could not have realized how people would talk if they thought

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we would not let her have the car; and so Mrs. DeWynt was obliged to insist upon her riding. The first time she went out alone in it she returned sitting upon the front seat, her hat in her lap, her hair ruffled by the wind, and deep in an animated conversation with the chauffeur. As they slowed down at the front door she sprang out, without waiting for the car to stop, and waved him a laughing farewell. Farrell, the second chauffeur, who is a young person, hardly more than a youth, looked sheepish, touched his cap and drove off.

“Oh, Mr. Penny,” Esmeralda exclaimed, running up the steps to me, “I’ve had such a lot of fun! We went sixty miles an hour!”

How I thanked heaven that only myself had witnessed that return! With what patience I could muster, I explained one simply must not talk that way with the chauffeur—especially the second chauffeur! And then I promised to say nothing to her aunt about her behavior. But, instead of being ap-

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preciative of my interest, Miss Sprunt seemed only puzzled and rather put out.

“He’s a mighty nice young chap!” she declared of the second chauffeur. “And he’s going to France to drive a munitions truck—the most dangerous job he can get. I admired his driving and told him what a fine driver he would make for the Front; and he’d been thinking of it all along! By the way, Mr. Penny, when do you get your commission?”

This was an entirely uncalled-for change of subject, and it annoyed me excessively. To begin with, it altered my position from that of inquisitor to the, as I may say, inquisited; second, I had no intention of going to France, as I am thirty-two, and was really needed at home by Mrs. DeWynt; third, I am morally convinced that Farrell, at the time he took her out that afternoon, had absolutely no intention of going to France in two weeks. If he had he would have given me notice. As it was, he gave me notice that very evening,

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thereby proving that the idea must have been engendered during his drive with Miss Esmeralda. Indeed, I am positive that something she said had to do with his decision. But, whatever the rights of the matter, one thing is certain—we lost our best machinist; and they are so hard to replace!

However, partly in order to spare my patroness as much as possible, and partly because there was something so simple and disarming about Miss Esmeralda, I refrained from reporting the matter. Also, I thus evaded a direct answer to her question about my commission!

I have mentioned only a few of the difficulties we experienced during that awful first week; but one of the principal ones was typified by the incident of Farrell. She would make friends with the servants, and it seemed absolutely impossible for her to realize that there was any reason why she should not. They developed an interest in her amounting almost to adoration and a

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feeling of unrest ensued in our domestic arrangements. I felt it immediately, as, of course, these things came under my general supervision. But it was when the men returned for the week-end that the real trouble began.

To begin with, Mrs. Langdon had arranged a little theater party at one of the summer shows, and Mrs. DeWynt had promised to lend Captain Tugwell, as the party was really being given for Marjorie. This plan was entered into enthusiastically by the captain, with an amendment.

“I say, why not let us all go in?” he suggested. “I’ll get another lot of stalls, and Mrs. DeWynt and Miss Esmeralda here can go to town in my car. I’ll drive them in, and we’ll all dine at the Ritz and go to the theater together.”

Before my dear patroness could cope with this emergency, Miss Esmeralda had, in her own uncouth language, cinched the matter.

“Oh, I’d love to!” said she. “And we haven’t any engagement. How lucky!”

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“But we haven’t another man,” objected Mrs. DeWynt. “It would make Kate Langdon’s party odd!”

“We’ll just take old Allie here along, dear Mrs. DeWynt!” replied the captain, overriding all objections.

And so it came about that I found myself speeding into town, squeezed in between Mrs. DeWynt and a lot of extra wraps on the back seat, while Miss Esmeralda shared the front of Captain Tugwell’s long low car with the captain himself, the two of them becoming wholly engrossed in an explanation of how the wretched thing worked. He actually allowed her to take the wheel a little while, until Mrs. DeWynt made me shout a protest against the wind—and the management of our breakneck speed was returned to the proper hands.

At the door of the Ritz the Langdon limousine was just ahead of us, and from it came Mrs. Langdon and Marjorie, Winnott St. Johns, Mr. and Mrs. Ted and Colonel Roycer. The ladies vanished to leave their wraps; and when

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they reappeared we got the first shock of the evening.

How the other women allowed her to do it I cannot imagine. The explanation must have been that she was the last to take her cloak off and that Mrs. DeWynt had left the dressing room ahead of her. But when Esmeralda came out into the corridor she had ruined a charming evening creation by tucking one of those terrible silk handkerchiefs of hers over the whole of the *décolletage*, like a kerchief!

It was the sort of thing about which one could do nothing. The kerchief, curiously, was becoming and I don't believe most of the men even noticed. Captain Tugwell was at her side at once, and so poor Mrs. DeWynt was helpless and could say nothing. Then the party went into the grill and dinner began. Fortunately there was no one who mattered in the room, except ourselves, though the place was crowded. Nor did anything unpleasant occur at the theater, except that Miss Esmeralda and

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the captain sat together and talked a great deal, leaving me to entertain Marjorie—no light task under the circumstances. Of course, with everybody regarding him in the light of being as good as engaged to her, she might well be disagreeable; and she was. But still, the theater was not bad; and then someone made the horrid suggestion that we go slumming!

Of course, the idea was taken up with acclaim. Personally I never can see why people like to go to places where no one goes and one never meets any people—if you know what I mean; and where the china is thick and the atmosphere uncertain. Still, nearly everyone in our set does go occasionally, and looks at the habitués, and orders something they, of course, do not eat; and then comes away. And I must admit that they are very apt to be sprightly affairs.

“But where shall we go?” asked Mrs. DeWynt. “I never remember the names of these Bohemian places!”

St. Johns suggested a famous Broad-

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way restaurant; but it was dismissed as too familiar. Then Mrs. Ted, who knows a lot of odd writing and painting people, and seems rather to enjoy them, mentioned a downtown hotel with a famous café, which, I believe, such persons frequent. It was instantly decided that we should go there; and, just to be different, we went down on the top of a bus, leaving the cars to follow. Miss Esmeralda liked this. Marjorie had got Captain Tugwell by the arm and did not intend letting him go. They were away up in front, and it so fell out that I found myself with Miss Esmeralda, on the rear seat. Just as I was anticipating a quiet, sensible little chat with her, the bus conductor shot his machine at us for fares. As I was feeling about for money Esmeralda engaged him in conversation.

“ I suppose you'll be holding up the Germans soon,” she said pleasantly, and somehow convincingly. “ You look strong and well. You didn't have any trouble getting accepted, did you? ”

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The busman, who was a handsome young chap, blushed as he gave me change.

“I—I haven’t applied yet,” he said.

“What!” exclaimed Miss Esmeralda. “You wearing a uniform and it’s not Uncle Sam’s?” She pointed at the company clothes he wore. “When are you going to graduate into khaki?”

“To-morrow, I guess,” said the young man sheepishly.

And I do believe the poor chap meant it. There was something strangely unsettling about Esmeralda’s eyes when she mentioned the war. Perhaps he felt it; I did, myself. At any rate, he stared after her over the rail as we descended; for by this time we had reached our destination. I was much chagrined; for I had wished to seize the opportunity of explaining to her my own reasons for staying at home, an explanation that somehow I had not had the chance of making before—which I had almost begun to believe was because she would not permit it.

CHAPTER IV

AND now we left that vulgar person, the busman, to the oblivion in which he belonged, and, with many evidences of gayety of spirit, plunged into the café, which was in the basement of an old-fashioned hotel building and a little below the level of the street.

The atmosphere of this place was most offensive, filled as it was with tobacco smoke and crowded with noisy persons in odd clothing. Ours, I am sure, were the only garments suitable for evening wear in the entire place! The mirrored walls reflected many curious faces; some of the men were long-haired and some of the ladies bobbed, and the manners of both were most casual. There was a considerable sprinkling of uniforms—our own dear boys in khaki, some hardy-looking marines, and several French naval uniforms.

Really, I could not but feel that it

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was hardly a suitable place for our party; and I could foresee that dear Mrs. DeWynt was probably not going to like the service. From her troubled countenance, my eyes fell upon that of Esmeralda. She was more animated than I had seen her for several days, and as she turned from Captain Tugwell to me she smiled.

“Great in here, isn’t it?” she remarked genially. “It reminds me of the Palace Saloon at home.”

To say that I was horrified is to put it too mildly. But the captain caught her up at once.

“I say, do they really have any wild saloons out your way?” he asked. “Tell me about them.”

“Oh, there’s nothing much to tell,” said she, “unless there’s a game held up, you know.”

And, with that, they were off again—she talking, he listening. I really don’t see what that girl saw in the chap! She was supposed to be my partner, and there she was, giving her exclusive at-

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tention where it most certainly did not belong!

In some confusion we finally squeezed in round a table suited to hold barely half our number, and then the slumming really began. We ordered drinks and Mrs. Ted began pointing out celebrities; several odd-looking people came up and spoke to her, and each of them took kindly to Miss Esmeralda. It was gay enough. The form of entertainment seemed to be that everybody at our table bought alcoholic stimulants for everybody who came up; but those who came up did not buy for us.

Still, the spirit of festivity grew, notwithstanding—that is, it grew for all save two: Marjorie and myself. The former had been forced into a corner near me and her mouth was very firmly set. I followed the direction of her glance and saw that Captain Tugwell was giving Esmeralda a lesson in French. Instinctively we both strained to hear what they said.

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“Porqui vos n’pas à la guerre?”
This incorrect phrase they were chanting together; at the time I couldn’t imagine why.

Suddenly Marjorie leaned toward me and hissed:

“Vulgar little person! She’s—she’s lassoing him!”

“She’s hardly little,” I protested, “or really vulgar, Miss Marjorie. She is merely a Child of Nature.”

“Bah! You too!” said Marjorie in disgust.

“Nature is a beautiful mother!” I heard my own voice say, apparently at a great distance.

“Too many cordials, Allie!” said Marjorie, and turned her shoulder to me.

I doubt it—about the cordials. I had had three; but I am by nature a sober man. Still I felt at the moment sufficient courage to reach across the table and attract Miss Esmeralda’s attention.

“What are you learning that phrase for?” I demanded.

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“I want to ask the waiter why he doesn't go to France,” said she.

Then she returned to the Englishman. If he had not been Lord Castlewing's cousin I should have cut him from my acquaintance forever from that moment!

“Captain Tugwell, I'm very hungry!” she said.

“Hungry? My word!” said the captain. “They have some splendid chicken *à la King* here!”

Esmeralda looked round guiltily, saw that her aunt was occupied, and made her request in a whisper.

“May I have ham and eggs, and some fried potatoes, instead?” she asked. “I haven't had any regular food since I came East!”

“How original!” exclaimed Captain Tugwell. “Of course you may! Here, *garçon!*” And he gave the order.

To comfort myself for the pain this scene had caused me, I took another cordial—they are really good for me; and then, as through a glass darkly, I

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saw that some confusion had been engendered behind the light partition which separated the main café from the bar. Several shouts arose; there was a scuffling and a sound of shattering glass; voices were raised—French voices, a German voice; then a large variety of American voices, all going at once.

There was a most unpleasant sound of pummeling—roars of pain; more crashes. Then a waiter rushed or, rather, skidded in through the swinging door.

On the instant the café was in confusion. Everyone arose. Chairs and tables were overturned or clambered upon as the men—notably those in uniform—rushed into the mêlée. In that low-ceilinged, smoke-saturated place the effect was frightful. Somehow or other I found myself on my feet and being ruthlessly propelled in the direction of one of the low windows by a firm grip on my arm.

It was a moment before I fully real-



THERE WAS A MOST UNPLEASANT SOUND OF PUMPELLING. THEN A WAITER SKIDDED IN THROUGH THE SWINGING DOOR

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ized that the hand which led me thus was that of my dear patroness, Mrs. DeWynt, who was shrieking at the top of her voice and forcing a way for the two of us in a very effective manner.

On either hand crowded other women of our party, and still others, who were strangers. My glasses fell off in the confusion, leaving me to struggle, half blinded, amid a whirling sea of femininity, as we plunged out over the low window sill into the little garden on the avenue.

It was really something of a struggle, for we met some men who were determined to enter by the window we were using for exit; but at length we gained the open air, and then Mrs. DeWynt collapsed upon my shoulder. I braced her against the taxi starter's box, where she stood gasping, and patting her jewels to see whether all were there.

"How terrible!" she moaned. "Oh, Allie, how awful! We ought really never to have come to such a middle-class place!"

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I agreed with her most heartily. Within, the din had grown infernal. Policemen could be seen rushing to the fray, and I had visions of having to prepare a list of our names for the morning papers—without my glasses! Captain Tugwell, the cousin of Lord Castlewing, would have to head it too—confound him!

Our cars were, as yet, nowhere in sight. On every hand people were rushing into that beastly place, shoving by us as though we were nobodies. Mrs. Langdon, Mrs. DeWynt, Marjorie and I were keeping close together, and not moving; it seemed the safest thing to do. Mrs. Ted had found some odd-looking male acquaintance, to whom she was excitedly explaining what had happened and begging him to rescue her husband, when St. Johns and Ted Collins himself appeared from round the corner, laughing.

“The cops have come!” called Ted. “They and the soldiers have calmed things down a bit. It was a peach of

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a fight—first amusing thing I've seen this evening!"

"Beastly mess!" complained St. Johns, wiping his monocle.

"Oh, let us find the cars and go home!" wailed Marjorie. "Where's Captain Tugwell?"

At that moment Captain Tugwell came out through the bar window and approached us rapidly.

"All safe?" he asked, giving us a rapid survey; then his voice grew sharp: "Where's Miss Esmeralda?"

"Esmeralda?" said Mrs. DeWynt weakly. "Why, dear me, I don't know!"

"I haven't seen her," said Marjorie; "and I don't want to. I want to go home."

"Has no one really seen her?" said Captain Tugwell anxiously. "By Jove, that's awful! It was a bad row; really, she may have been hurt! I—I—excuse me, please——"

"Hold on!" said I. "I'm going with you."

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But Captain Tugwell had already disappeared through the window; and, taking my courage in my hands, I followed, trembling; not from any fear of the mob for myself, but—I confess it—sick with apprehension as to what might have happened to that girl, so wantonly abandoned in the hour of danger.

Since the early days of my childhood in Boston, I have ever observed that the pictured terrors of one's imagination are almost inevitably more dreadful than the cold facts found exigent on an impartial examination of the reality—if you know what I mean! And it must be confessed that in the case of our rescue of Miss Esmeralda this assumption held true.

As we—Captain Tugwell and I came, as I may say, charging in through the window, the captain in the lead, myself following with all due expedition, almost the very first thing we saw was Miss Esmeralda herself, still sitting at the table we others had all quitted in

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such confusion! I say still, because I have evidence that she had not moved. I believe I mentioned her request for what I take to be a sort of native food with her—ham and eggs and fried potatoes. Well, this crude dish had just been set before her when the excitement started. And at the moment of our re-entry she was about halfway through her strange supper! Moreover, she was the only person in the café who was still calmly eating, though a few others were straggling back to their places.

Miss Esmeralda's red hair made a striking note of color as she sat there in this oddly reposeful way, and she was apparently not in the least concerned by our absence. Indeed, at the moment of our return she was gazing earnestly up at the stodgy face of a waiter and practicing her newly acquired linguistic accomplishment.

"Pourquoi n'pas vos a Front?" she was demanding of the stodgy one earnestly, though, of course, absurdly.

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“ Parce que je suis Suisse, ma’m’selle! ”

“ Suisse Suisse! ” she repeated, puzzled. Then she hailed Captain Tugwell with a smile. “What’s his excuse?” she demanded.

And Captain Tugwell was so surprised and relieved that he answered her question before he inquired for her; not that any inquiring was really necessary—that was obvious.

“He says he’s a Swiss!” said the captain. “I say, now; you haven’t been here all the time, have you?”

“Why, it wasn’t much of a fight,” explained Esmeralda. “Just somebody hit a German. I saw they weren’t drawing any guns; so I thought I’d better sit tight and finish my supper. I knew you’d all be back.”

The relief I experienced was intense; but I felt that this preposterous situation had continued long enough.

“Miss Esmeralda, your aunt is waiting for you outside,” said I. “May I help you on with your wraps?”

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“Oh, there you are back again, Penny!” said she, turning to me, the little mole on her left eyebrow giving her a more quizzical look than ever. “So there you are again! You went out of that window pretty pronto, didn’t you? And you are not a neutral Swiss, either?”

It was fearfully embarrassing. I could hardly explain that I had been impelled by Mrs. DeWynt. And my inadvertent, as I may call it, behavior, on top of her attitude toward my feeling of duty about not enlisting, was distinctly, annoying. But she did consent to come along, though she cast a reluctant glance back at the remnants of her supper.

Outside we found the cars had arrived, and that Mrs. DeWynt was fully restored to her usual executive capacity.

“Esmeralda Sprunt, what is this outrageous thing I hear!” she exclaimed. “You are to get right in the back of the car with me! I shan’t allow

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you out of my sight again. Allie, you get in front with the captain.”

And so obeying, when the good nights were said, we drove home—a miserably cold, silent drive, during which the captain and I found little to say to each other, and the ladies less. Esmeralda maintained a puzzled silence; she, as usual, could not see what she had done to displease. Take it all in all, Mrs. Langdon’s party had been a miserable failure.

CHAPTER V

IT was with the nervously depleting effects of the terrible night just described still upon me, that I was obliged to arise next day and take up the heavy responsibilities which were mine.

Being accountable for the smooth, or as I may say impeccable, running of a *menage* such as the DeWynts', is never a light task—not even on those days when we are alone, or practically so, for one can never tell what emergency will arise in the matter of entertaining, can one? But the day, as I may say, for it was barely nine-thirty when I arose—of the morning following that hideous slumming expedition, was further burdened with the shadow of a forthcoming event which, although long expected by me, was none the less awe-inspiring when I realized that its eventuation was imminent.

You will doubtless recall that at the

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opening of this chronicle I made a seemingly slight and passing but, in reality, deeply significant reference to an impending bridge drive, which my dear patroness had devised as a means of replenishing the nearly always depleted coffers of our local branch of the Red Cross. Of course, you will at once appreciate the fact that this condition in that admirable organization is not uncommon—at least in our part of the world.

To me it has always been a matter for annoyed conjecture why people at large cannot see that rich persons are constantly hampered by enormous personal expenses—indeed that the richer they are the greater become their obligations to themselves and the upkeep of their position. The proportion of what they have to give away actually diminishes in accordance with the size of what they are obliged to spend, if you know what I mean. But anyone on the inside of such a circle as ours will readily perceive my meaning. Of course, our

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local branch was poor—why not, when one considers the innumerable obligations of its members? And although when we were first organized I recall that there were many generous donations toward furnishing the rooms in the village which the local real estate person, I think it was, had loaned rent free for this usage, which donations included two comfortable wicker arm-chairs which dear Mrs. DeWynt took from my sitting room, still when the question of actual cash funds arose, all the ladies were in perfect accord as to how the obtaining of them should be accomplished;—namely by the good conservative method of a benefit of some sort. And so we had, as occasion demanded, amateur theatricals and informal costume dance at the club, and now the treasury being again at, as I may say, ebb-tide, was to come the most important function of this sort which had so far occurred during the season—the bridge drive on Mrs. DeWynt's lawn.

Let it be clearly understood that Mrs.

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DeWynt made no small sacrifice in allowing this piece of patriotic effort to be consummated upon her premises, involving as it did an enormous expense for caterers, for hiring of public furniture for the seating of that select public which would be admitted, and a considerable amount of my time and strength which was, of course, somewhat diverted from my usual duties and focussed upon the success of the afternoon. I had prepared lists, arranged with the newspapers and photographers, and in every way taken the greatest care that the affair should have the appearance of extreme exclusiveness, for no one would pay five dollars admission to something which seemed in any manner lacking, as I may say, in *cachet*. And, of course, we expected a large crowd to be drawn by dear Mrs. DeWynt's name and well-known Italian garden.

This much having been clearly demonstrated, and the undoubted sacrifice which our household was making under-

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stood, surprise at the attitude which Miss Esmeralda took regarding the forthcoming event will be the greater.

Coming downstairs so early I had scarcely anticipated encountering any of the household except the servants—particularly in view of that unspeakable evening just passed. But fortunately I am never embarrassed by unexpected meetings, always being arrayed in the most meticulous manner, even when about to perform the more material duties of my situation, such as overseeing Hoskins while he oversaw the caterer's men in the arrangement of the tables on the West terrace. Therefore it was with some surprise, although without embarrassment, that I encountered Miss Esmeralda upon emerging through the drawing-room window into the sunlight beyond.

As usual, she was the first thing discernible, being perched upon the terrace balustrade in a most undignified posture, her red head fairly, as I may say, burning against the blue waters

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beyond. That uncouth animal, the Jeff-dog, was with her, of course, and she was watching the caterer's men hurrying about, while she swung one foot to the rhythm of the tune she was singing—"My Country 'Tis of Thee," it was, I believe. When she saw me she jumped down and met me half-way across the terrace.

"Say, Penny!" she began abruptly, waving one of her capable hands in a sweeping gesture which encompassed the entire activity then in progress by the caterer's men in conjunction with our own servants:—"Say, Penny, how much is this blow-out going to cost in cold cash?"

For a moment I pondered her singular inquiry, having first interpreted her language to myself and digested it.

"Do you mean that you wish to know the extent of the expenditure which your aunt is making in this good cause?" I inquired in my turn, endeavoring to insinuate a more proper attitude of mind into Miss Esmeralda than

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that which was all too plainly existent in her.

“That’s about it,” said Miss Esmeralda. “What will it set her back?”

“Your aunt has not set any definite limit on the expenditure,” I replied, “nor have I any exact figures on the matter. I do not believe that dear Mrs. DeWynt would consider it altogether delicate to keep too close a track on such a thing. But roughly speaking and including the music I would say that the cost will be at least fifteen hundred dollars.”

I made this announcement with some pride, but I cannot truthfully record that Miss Esmeralda was duly impressed. Instead, she stood there fixing me with that quizzical look of hers which always upset me so unaccountably.

“And how many invitations at five dollars a ticket have been sent out?” she went on.

“Two hundred,” I replied. “This is to be distinctly exclusive—if the list

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were too large the people who are rather on the outside would not be so eager to come!"

"So if every one of them *does* come," said Miss Esmeralda slowly, "you will take in a thousand dollars. And the show will have cost half as much again!"

To say that I was shocked by her commercial attitude is putting it mildly. But I endeavored to clarify her point of view as was ever my custom when she obtruded her ignorance, which was the more pitiful because of its utter unconsciousness, if you know what I mean.

"My dear Miss Esmeralda!" I remonstrated as gently as possible, "you do not understand. This is not a commercial investment in which your dear aunt is putting fifteen hundred dollars with the prospect of getting back her money and having a profit left over to turn into the hands of the Red Cross! Every cent which comes in will be turned over to that organization by her in person at the next committee meet-


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ing. The money she is spending is spent out of her own pocket!"

"Then why doesn't she give it direct to the Red Cross," Miss Esmeralda wanted to know, "instead of going to all this bother? They'd be making on it at that!"

"My dear Miss Esmeralda," I protested, "can you not perceive that more than mere money will come of this? Many women now without interest in the Red Cross will gain that interest through having attended this function: the organization will get publicity from it in connection with Mrs. DeWynt's name. And besides, the upkeep of any charitable organization conducted by gentlepeople is never done in the way you suggest. If such a thing were even attempted it would at once lose the interest of our set!"

"I don't know about the interest of any decent
Esmeralda slowly
know that the Red
itable institutions



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was a patriotic affair like men volunteering for the army. And as for the business end of it, if your local branch doesn't know any more about it than you say, well, it's time they learned, that's all!"

With that she turned and left me there, wordless before such a peculiar viewpoint, and much annoyed at her mention of volunteering for the army, which to me appeared a wholly unnecessary and tactless reference to myself. But without awaiting to discover whether or not I had anything further to say, she and that low animal of hers disappeared in the direction of the garage.

When they were quite gone from sight I addressed myself to the work for which I had descended at such an impossible hour. But the fulfillment of my task was purely mechanical. Despite my utmost endeavor I could not but ponder upon this, as I may call her, stranger in our midst, and her peculiar conception of almost every custom

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which had long ago been settled correctly by — by precedent, or some equally good authority, if you know what I mean. And the longer I thought as I abstractedly watched Hoskins direct the caterer's men, the greater became my despair of ever making an adequate impression upon Miss Esmeralda. She simply could not be moved to perceive the importance of the most vital components of ordinary social organization. Take bridge, for example. My dear patroness, when she discovered that the game was unknown even by name to her niece, entrusted me with the not repugnant task of instructing that young lady in the rudiments of the art.

“Allie,” said my dear lady, “Allie, get two other poor players who won't mind, and make that girl learn. If I am to take her about with me at all she must have some equipment as a dinner guest!”

And so although I would have infinitely preferred double-dummy, I

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managed to persuade Mrs. Ted, who is absolutely shameless about the quality of her game, and her husband, who was always most awfully decent to our Western relative, to assist me in imparting the necessary knowledge to Miss Esmeralda. And my complaint is not that she failed to learn the game. Far from that! She acquired it with an ease that was almost unmaidenly. But she did not care for it, or so she said, as a pastime.

“I think this game is a dead one!” she announced after the first hour during which I may mention *en passant* she had won a dollar and sixty cents at a penny a point. “It moves so slowly!”

I endeavored to explain to her that the game was an intellectual effort and hardly a “pastime,” as she had termed it, and how it broadened one, and strengthened the brain. Mr. and Mrs. Ted failed to give me much backing on this, and I fear it did not make much impression on our pupil, for she only said:—

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“What does it strengthen and broaden *your* brain for, Penny?”

“Why — er — for more and better bridge!” I replied.

Really the girl had a way of asking the most pointless questions at times! And so, although I could faithfully report to my dear patroness that she had learned the game and learned it well, I was careful not to add that she had no real taste for it. If I had but mentioned the fact what disaster might we not have avoided! But at the time I had no conception that Miss Esmeralda’s lack of enthusiasm about what I fancy I may well term the national sport of the best people, could possibly have any deeper significance than a mere expression of personal taste.

Nor did the appearance of the too-large table upon the terrace have any sinister aspects to my unsuspecting eyes.

Its advent occurred directly after Miss Esmeralda had left me to the performance of my duties after her, as I

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may call it, questionnaire, regarding the cost of the forthcoming festivities.

As I have mentioned, I was superintending Hoskins as he superintended the caterer's men, and I confess that I was somewhat absorbed in thoughts along other lines than those connected with my immediate task when Hoskins called upon me to settle an important point. I awoke from my, as I may call it, reverie, to find him at my elbow.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Hoskins, "but if we scatter the tables so that they occupy the entire terrace, they'll be rather skimpy looking, sir, and far apart, sir!"

I pulled myself together and grasped this difficult situation with that firmness which dear Mrs. DeWynt has been so kind as to describe as my masterly hand on the proper setting for a social function. I considered the size of the card tables, the length of the terrace, and the likely number of guests. Hoskins was undoubtedly correct. It was at this point that I gave those directions which

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afterwards had such fatal consequences.

“Have the tables put closer together, Hoskins,” I instructed him, “and fill out the far end by having one of the long tables from the library brought out. You may put a large bowl of tall, bright-colored flowers in the center and place cigarettes, matches, and extra packs of new cards on either side.”

I saw to the doing of this myself, and as a result the terrace balanced nicely. Not too empty, nor yet overcrowded, but giving that pleasing sense of rightness which is so essential to the *morale* of any large outdoor function, if you know what I mean;—an arrangement which prevented the guests from feeling too uncomfortably close to nature, and all of that. I then established the position for the music, the time and method of serving tea, and at length felt at liberty to indulge in a well-earned rest.

Is it not strange how often the most momentous incidents can come upon us without casting the, as I may say, faintest shadow of foreboding before them?

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From the most serene sky can come, as some poet-chap has it—doubtless one of Mrs. Ted's Bohemian curiosities—from a serene blue sky can come a bolt; or words to that effect. And possibly one of the very oddest things about our sky while Miss Esmeralda was technically in our midst (for, of course, she was never really one of us), was that the bolts usually came in groups of two or even more. And the apparently well-attended-to-day of our bridge drive was actually one of the worst.

I have described how, my morning's labor ended, I was about to retire to the privacy of my chambers and indulge in a milk shake and a concentrated perusal of the social notes in the more important newspapers, with a view of thus getting refreshment both intellectual and physical, when a most amazing occurrence temporarily impeded my progress.

At dear Mrs. DeWynt's otherwise perfect country place there is one architectural defect. It is a narrow and even

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at noon totally dark corridor which attaches the culinary department to the luncheon-room. This amazing error in construction is due to the unfortunate fact that the plans of the house as originally submitted to my dear patroness and approved by her, contained no culinary department whatsoever. You see, the architect who made the drawings was Reginald Carrington-Tweedle; — old Tweedle's only son, you know. And, of course, when Mrs. DeWynt heard that the poor misguided young chap had actually gone in for such a, as I might almost say, menial occupation as one of the arts, she at once, with her unfailing class instinct, felt that the least she could do for his poor mother was to assist him in confining his employment to the best people only. Besides which it was his first commission, and so, of course, a very large fee was out of the question.

But, unfortunately, neither young Reggie nor my dear lady even thought about the kitchens and so forth, with the

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result that the house was nearly built before this important though vulgar detail was missed. Consequently the necessary addition was hastily added, but the aforementioned dark little hallway was unavoidable. On one side of this corridor was the butler's pantry, on the other side, the luncheon-room. At one end of it was a small dressing room for guests' hats and so forth, and at the other end the main-hall. Now to my incident.

As I was crossing the last mentioned end, who should I encounter but Miss Esmeralda, who ran into me at a great speed, and being both a trifle breathless and inclined to suppressed mirth, pulled me into the nearest drawing-room. It was only then that I got the opportunity of observing that, although she was evidently gowned for luncheon in a most becoming frock of white lace,—a gift of generous Mrs. DeWynt's, I have no doubt—in one hand she carried a partially consumed ham sandwich of enormous proportions.

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“Penny!” she said excitedly, “tell me quick! Do I look anything like Mrs. Langdon, even in the dark?”

I did not need to hesitate. Even though Miss Esmeralda looked undeniably smart and indeed, in my estimation, beautiful, she in no-wise resembled our distinguished divorcée, and I told her so quite frankly.

“Well, Penny, you old copper,” said Miss Esmeralda, “I’ve just been kissed for her in the corridor!”

“Kissed!” I exclaimed in all due horror, a sort of sickening feeling coming upon me at the thought, “Will you kindly explain?”

“Well,” said Miss Esmeralda, “I’ve just been in the kitchen getting Gaston, your chef, to fix me up a little snack to ward off starvation till the luncheon company all get here, and as I was crossing the dark hall, that Mr. Winnott St. Johns grabbed me and kissed me. And here I am alive, having had the sense to hold on to my food during the battle. I tell you, Penny, I’ve had

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a hunch all along that he and Mrs. Langdon were keeping company. Don't you tell on him—but never, never again think, even to yourself, that I am not just as stylish as the rest of you folks! Aunt Sally's taste in clothes gets across even in the dark.”

And then that awful young woman was off with a laugh, running up the front stairs and finishing her crude morsel of food quite openly.

But that was only the beginning. Before I could recover my breath, Winnott himself came into the room almost, as I may say, at a run, which he however quickly controlled as soon as he caught sight of me, and spoke most composedly, he being pre-eminently one of ourselves and seldom if ever showing emotion. He simply shot his cuffs and addressed me in a voice that lacked nothing in composure except a little, as I may put it, wind.

“Did Marjorie DeWynt pass this way?” was the amazing question which he put to me,

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“She did not,” I said. “I believe she has not as yet arrived, although she will be here for luncheon.”

“Oh—ah!” said he. “I—I—rather thought I saw her.”

“Miss Sprunt,” I began, to put him on his guard for the future, “passed here just ahead of you.”

“What?” he almost yelled, turning a bit white and then red. “What?” Truly he was most surprised.

Then he quickly lit a cigarette, and as he did not offer me one, but stalking out through one of the French-windows, left me to my own devices, I continued my progress toward my own rooms without further interruption. On the way upstairs I could not but smile at the curiously piquant flavor which is somehow attached to many of the doings of dear Mrs. DeWynt’s set. Here was Winnott waiting about for Mrs. Langdon to get her divorce and Miss Marjorie DeWynt was as good as engaged to Captain Tugwell and—well, of course, if it had occurred

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in any other set it might have appeared a trifle improper. As it was, of course, the situation could merely be called, as I have said, piquant, and I was rather pleased with my astuteness in ascertaining it. Almost it made up for my lack of opportunity for rest, because we were forced to have luncheon earlier—at barely half-after-one as a matter of fact, because the Senator motored down ahead of time, bringing Mr. Willy.

Now it is far from my mind to make any critical comment about the husband of my dear patroness; nevertheless, while he is, of course, the most powerful Republican senator we have, and a man of enormous distinction and importance, I greatly fear that his very early life, which was spent in some obscure occupation in the far west—an affair I believe which had some connection with the construction of trans-continental railroads—has left its mark upon him in certain ways.

Of course, he is always beautifully

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tailored, and is so silent when at home that his manner is nearly perfect. But he appears with all his opportunity, with all the, as I may say, arduous labors of my dear patroness and the unlimited effort which she has made to spend his enormous wealth to the most advantageous ends—he appears, I repeat, to have utterly failed to develop any interest in, or enjoyment of, our many splendid functions, and can only be persuaded to attend an occasional one after what, from a person of less importance than Mrs. DeWynt, might honestly be termed a severe urging.

It appears that such an inducement had been put upon him just prior to the occasion of our bridge drive for the benefit of the Red Cross. Dear Mrs. DeWynt, being a woman of infinite mind and foresight, of course realized what a splendid asset the Senator's presence would be at such an affair. And his own plans for a little golf coinciding with her arrangements, he had consented to appear, although curiously

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enough he does not play bridge and merely gave his word to be on hand for a few moments during the afternoon.

Well, the Senator's arrival a little early, with the demand that luncheon be hurried in order that he and Mr. Willy might play a round of their golf before fulfilling their promise put us all in a great flurry. But fortunately the few guests we expected were all ready in the house, my dear patroness following the good old Long Island colony custom of having people wandering about the place at all times.

I went into luncheon with the family, as is always my custom on these informal occasions. There were only Marjorie and Captain Tugwell, Miss Esmeralda, St. Johns and Mrs. Langdon, beside the Senator, Mr. Willy and my dear patroness. The Senator was this day unusually taciturn and at intervals cast a gloomy, speculative eye upon the festive arrangements beyond the windows. But while this silence might easily have cast a damper upon

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the affair, dear Mrs. DeWynt was so much on the alert, owing to the part she was to play during the afternoon, that she positively kept us all going; or ought to have.

Yet, despite her cheeriness, something was wrong with the atmosphere. Even before the Senator's unfortunate remark. Mrs. Langdon for some reason had a concealed but discernible uneasiness about her, if you know what I mean; and St. Johns did not seem to have wholly recovered from the dazed condition in which he had left me a short while before, and which had palpably increased since Marjorie DeWynt's arrival in her roadster, from which I had seen him help her to descend. Altogether things were not quite happy when the Senator spoke. Taki and Whaki, Mrs. DeWynt's prize Pekinese were disporting themselves about the room in the free manner which was always allowed them, and it was *à propos* of them that the Senator spoke.

"Where is your dog, Essie?" said

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the Senator to Miss Esmeralda. "I never see him in the dining-room, and *he* is a regular dog!"

Miss Esmeralda's face took on a worried expression;—one of the few occasions when she gave any such appearance.

"I don't know where Jeff is, Uncle," said she. "He got away from me this morning, going after some birds, and I can't find him. But I guess he'll find me before long!"

Now it sometimes occurs that a word uttered lightly and even thoughtlessly may prove a prophecy, if you know what I mean. And in this instance I regret to state it proved so. This was a fatal day for all of us, and if it were not for the necessity of making a complete vindication of my dear patroness I would omit what followed. But were I to omit it, some malicious person might at some future period disclose the event in all its horror, and the rest of this record be accused of worthlessness by reason of the omission.

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Miss Esmeralda had scarcely mentioned her supposition that her animal would find her, when her words were fulfilled. How the creature managed to elude the second footman and Hoskins both, I cannot imagine, but he entered the room silently, and our attention was first called to him by a curious snapping sound. It came during a momentary lull in the conversation and as a consequence we all looked in the direction from which it came. And there in full view of the entire assemblage lay Jeff, his front paws upon an object the nature of which was not at first discernible, and at a portion of which he was gently pulling with his teeth. He would grasp the flexible surface and pull back his head; and then open his jaws, whereupon the thing would snap back into place with a sound which was evidently pleasing to the brute. It was a long moment before any of us understood, and had not the Senator unexpectedly roared with laughter, the terrible scene which ensued might conceivably have

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been avoided; at least in its worst aspects. But the Senator's laugh did the damage irrevocably. The sound startled that Jeff-dog, who sprang to his feet, still holding firmly to his prize. And then we all saw. It was distinctly and undeniably a rubber corset! Mercifully the picture lasted but a moment for Jeff, possibly fearful of the loss of that—that unmentionable object, flew—I can use no other adequate term—flew out through the window—and Miss Esmeralda after him!

CHAPTER VI

Now this last was of course the very worst thing which could have happened. For dear Mrs. DeWynt being undeniably stout, and avowedly reducing, there was but one logical ownership for the wretched thing. And had Miss Esmeralda but remained seated we might not have seen it again—or heard of it. But no! Off she rushed after that impossible beast of hers, calling, “Jeff! Here, Jeff! Bring that here this instant, sir!” My poor dear patroness lay back in an almost fainting condition the while the Senator laughed and laughed with actual tears running down his face. Really, I cannot bring myself to make a criticism of so prominent a man; but I can and will at this moment refer to marriage, which no one holds above criticism; and I hereby state that I can well perceive that at times things occur, such as lack of

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proper sympathy for example, which must make the married state well nigh unbearable.

I will say of Miss Esmeralda that she did not bring that—that supposedly necessary but most indecorous garment back with her to the luncheon table. She rescued it from her pet whom she soundly boxed on the ears, and gave the thing to Mrs. DeWynt's maid who at the alarm had hurried out onto the terrace. But Miss Esmeralda did something almost as bad. She returned to her place a trifle flushed and spoke directly to her aunt who had only partially recovered.

“I got it all right, Aunt Sally,” said that unabashed but honestly apologetic young person. “I got it all right and it isn't much torn. I think it can even be used again. I am so sorry, because I've noticed in the advertisements how expensive they are.”

At this my dear patroness merely glared at her uncouth niece, her face the color which I will term a blush, but

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which in a person of less social importance might almost have been called purple.

Of course, the whole thing was dropped immediately. But a most curious part of it all was the fact that somehow the dullness seemed to have been entirely wiped out of the luncheon party! A fact which, in view of the tragic thing which had just occurred, puzzles me to this day.

I have at times considered it is to be regretted that among ourselves a certain good old English custom has been dropped;—to wit that of the proper chastisement of insubordinate young females by the elders in authority—a tradition which seems to have become obsolete unless indeed it is still maintained by laboring persons, petty clerks and so forth. But among us there appears to be no method by which the hapless parent or guardian can, as I may say, establish his or her authority over the untractable junior. And such was the position of Mrs. DeWynt. Of course,

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one of the chief difficulties my dear patroness encountered was the fact that after all Miss Esmeralda never did anything wrong. Merely things which are simply not done, if you know what I mean, and all with a disarming simplicity which loudly proclaimed her entire innocence of intent to do a single thing out of the ordinary.

Perchance, if the ancient power vested in the older members of the, as I may call them, baronial households had been applicable to Miss Esmeralda, the disasters of the day might have ended at the luncheon table. But as the modern tendency to giving younger women an absolutely free hand has apparently become an unassailable precedent, Mrs. DeWynt was helpless, except for the quality of her facial expression, and it is well known that when my dear patroness concludes to assume her cloak of unapproachableness the effect is, to put it mildly, dampening. But curiously enough its impression upon her niece was nil, and that young lady reappeared

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in the afternoon arrayed in a delicious creation of cinnamon chiffon, which was only very slightly marred by the addition of one of her inevitable silk kerchiefs. Upon this occasion it merely gave her a sort of rather suitable sports look, and her manner bore not the slightest trace of shame or repentance. Upon the strictest instructions she had locked her terrible Jeff-dog into safe quarters, and it seemed to me that she hung about in rather a forlorn manner, waiting for the guests to arrive, being accompanied only by Captain Tugwell, who sat beside her on the edge of the terrace, and seemed to be endlessly talking about beastly unpleasant things like the war, which I am sure must have bored her awfully, although she made every effort to conceal the fact, owing doubtless to her undeniable kindness of heart. Had I not been so overwhelmed by my final duties in regard to the imminent advent of the guests, I would, of course, have rescued her out of sheer pity.

But people were arriving before I

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could reach her, and naturally I was at once almost rushed to death with the effort of attending to these semi-strangers and at the same time appearing very leisurely and casual in my manner, if you know what I mean. The Senator and Mr. Willy had disappeared almost immediately after luncheon, and the other members of our own crowd had grouped themselves defensively in the long drawing-room, where Hoskins had set out a special table with drinks. This was keeping them amused, because St. Johns had invented some concoction which he called "a frozen hell," and the ladies, Miss Marjorie in particular, seemed to find it very entertaining to "play bartender," as they called it, and help him in the manufacture of them. The loud indifference of this group to the arriving guests, which was of course one of the recognized privileges of their social standing, made my work a trifle difficult. Dear Mrs. DeWynt could, it is true, occasionally be, as I may say, pried away from the group when I whis-

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pered to her of some more important arrival. But she always returned to her own unit at the earliest possible instant. Captain Tugwell and Miss Esmeralda, with their heads close together at the far end of the terrace, were of course worse than useless and so the whole thing devolved upon me.

Fortunately the bridge tables were not difficult to seat, and when the orchestra began softly to play it helped, as subdued music always does, to veil as it were, the awkwardness incident to the raw beginnings of almost any entertainment. It is odd, really, how few of the men we knew had come to this function: or even if they had appeared, troubled to play. The Senator and Mr. Willy had plainly avowed their preference for golf—an exerting occupation for which I personally have very little use. And St. Johns, that champion of the brainy and, as I may call it, scientific game of bridge, was devoting himself to the concoction of his newly invented beverage! Nevertheless, there was a

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sprinkling of men at the tables; for the most part younger, dancing fellows, who were more or less useful for that sort of thing and for big dinners or any place where one runs rather short.

But the affair was dragging—even after the usual crucial first half hour. There is no denying it—the bridge drive was not promising to prove the brilliant success which we had anticipated with such supposedly well-grounded confidence. The reporters had arrived and the camera men, but it is an unfortunate truth that the guests had not. That is to say, nothing like so many of them as we had expected and provided for. Indeed, I felt it incumbent upon me to hold the newspaper and photographic persons in conversation as long as was possible, hoping that more people would appear. But although the day was very fine, and all conditions auspicious, it is actually true that not quite half of the outsiders whom Mrs. DeWynt had commissioned me to invite, put in an appearance.

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As I was in the midst of, as it were, restraining the persons from the press and experiencing more than the usual difficulties in so doing, I caught sight of an unexpected move on the part of Miss Esmeralda. She and Captain Tugwell arose from their seats and I, helplessly caught in the very midst of an unfinished sentence addressed to the reporters, was obliged to witness without protest the beginnings of the extraordinary performance which ensued.

Without even calling upon the assistance of a servant Miss Esmeralda and Captain Tugwell removed the large bowl of flowers from the center of that long table which had been moved out from the library, and next ascertained by use of the Captain's handkerchief, that the surface was completely dry. Then, getting rid also of the supply of surplus tobacco, Miss Esmeralda broke the seals of a couple of packs of new cards and began some mysterious manipulations with them.

Must I say that this conspicuous con-

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duct of hers drew the attention of every eye? There will be no need to make such an assurance. Playing was partially suspended at every table, those who were at the moment dummy giving their entire interest to the red-headed girl, who I regret to add, had not even troubled to lower her voice.

“Believe me, it moves a whole lot faster than bridge,” she was assuring Lord Castlewing’s cousin. “And money skips right along through it like a sheriff’s posse was on its trail. Let me show you. . . .”

At this juncture Mrs. Ted, who was evidently neither interested in the bridge nor in Winnott’s new drink, strolled out and joined the two at the long table.

“Why, hello!” said Mrs. Ted, in her odd, unconventional manner which somehow never offends anyone, “Why, hello! Here’s a game I like too!”

Almost simultaneously the Senator and Mr. Willy appeared around the corner of the house, looking very seri-

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ous, as if the prospect of the promised fulfillment of duty ahead lay, as I may say, heavily on their minds. However, at sight of Miss Esmeralda, the Captain and Mrs. Ted, they cautiously skirted the bridge crowd, and joined the group at the long table. When the Senator saw what was in progress there he emitted what I can only describe as a howl of joy. Really, I am aware that such a statement regarding so prominent a personage might easily be accounted an indiscretion. But such was the fact. I might further add that his face broke into a smile which gave him almost the aspect of a child who has unexpectedly come upon a new toy. Mr. Willy, of the President's Purchasing Board, also gave a distinct demonstration of pleasure, and one of the bridge players, who was dummy at the table nearest this newly-developed group, also arose and joined them—a young man he was, about whom we really knew very little.

These peculiar demonstrations were,

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I confess, too much for my powers of composure, and so, excusing myself to the press people, I hastily traversed the length of the terrace with the intent of ascertaining what was, as I may say, afoot. As I, simultaneously with one or two others, joined the group, Miss Esmeralda looked up from her occupation of dealing out cards in a most peculiar fashion, and caught my eye.

“Hello, Penny!” said Miss Esmeralda briskly. “Want to get in?”

And it was at this moment that I discovered the horrible but undisputable fact that she had a little pile of money at her elbow—actual cash—bank notes and silver! Now, of course, all the best people play for money—that goes without the saying. But always by check, or at any rate matters are settled after the game, the amounts being inconspicuously tabulated. But real money on the table with ladies present—*really!* shocked as I was I managed a reply to her question.

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“Get in?” I said. “What are you playing, may I ask?”

“Blackjack!” said she briefly.

“I fear I do not comprehend,” said I somewhat stiffly. “Is it a native American Indian game of some sort?”

“Indians have been known to play it,” replied Miss Esmeralda. “But since you are so particular, the right name is Fantianna.”

“Fantianna?” I repeated puzzled. “May I ask you to interpret?”

“Why Penny, you bluff!” said Miss Esmeralda. “I thought you knew French! It means twenty-one, of course!”

A light, as I may say, broke upon me at this.

“*Vingt-et-un!*” I exclaimed.

“Have it your own way,” said she cheerfully, “but a natural wins in any language.”

This last informal remark was addressed to the Senator, and I turned away hastily to find and take counsel with my dear patroness. Matters were

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coming to a terrible state. People were leaving the bridge tables quite unceremoniously and crowding about the quickly moving red head of our Western relative, whose clear voice could be heard calling out such strange remarks as:—

“Crack ’em down, boys! The money won’t grow in your pocket like the hair on your heads!”

A short silence ensued. Then I was amazed to hear the Senator’s voice excitedly calling out, “Hit me! Hit me! Whoa!”

Laughter began to manifest itself among the crowd, and an air of gayety which was of a quality quite different from our sort of thing, started to develop. I fairly fled to Mrs. DeWynt. The situation was becoming serious.

She was still in the drawing-room, unconscious of all that was happening, and when I whispered the alarming tidings in her ear she, with her ever-ready social generalship, if you know what I mean, mustered the little crowd

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of intimates from about the improvised bar, and led them out upon the terrace with full intent to break up that ridiculous gathering about the library table, which I had so inadvertently placed there as a means to an unforeseen end.

Now if there is anything which one expects of one's friends it is that they will herd with one in a social crisis. Most certainly such a thing could have been justifiably expected from such persons as St. Johns, Mrs. Langdon, Ted Collins, Miss Marjorie and the Lennetts. And to do them justice, Marjorie and Mrs. Langdon certainly stuck to my dear patroness in the best possible form. But whether St. Johns' new alcoholic experiment had anything to do with the matter, or whether there was really something contagious about that long table and the, as I may say, presiding spirit, I cannot pretend to state. But I do know that hardly had Mrs. DeWynt's little group reached the scene of action than all save the two aforementioned ladies deserted, creating a

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situation which was, to say the least of it, deucedly awkward. There was but one thing to do and my dear lady did it without hesitation.

“William!” she said, raising her lorgnette and staring fixedly at the Senator. “William, I think you and I might form the basis of a new bridge table. At once!”

It was masterly—or ought to have been, but somehow it wasn't. The Senator unfortunately happened to be winning at that moment and the face he turned to his wife was actually flushed with excitement, while his eyes shone like a boy's.

“Not on your life, Sally!” he cried laughingly. “Wow! A natural—once and a half!”

It was truly awful. But I do not think that anyone excepting Mrs. DeWynt and myself really heard him, there was so much noise going on; and, of course, we covered it at once by talking and laughing with the rest and seeming to form a part of what was

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shortly the event of the day. The Senator was, however, irrepressible. He even urged his wife to take part in Miss Esmeralda's outrageous undertaking.

"You ought to get into this, old girlie!" he cried. "It's the squarest game I've seen in a long time. Stands on seventeen, draws to sixteen and doesn't take stand-offs. And pays once and a half for naturals!"

Of course, Mrs. DeWynt paid no more attention to this remark than would any self-respecting wife. But no one noticed this little difference of opinion, because just then Mr. Willy—the Mr. Willy of the President's Purchasing Board—suddenly began shouting:

"Once more, once more—busted, by God!"

Miss Esmeralda, totally unabashed by this outbreak, as I may almost say, of profanity, acclaimed in a loud clear voice that her bank roll having increased she was now prepared to take bets of ten dollars. No one responding immediately she renewed her familiar sing-

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song—a sort of aboriginal chant I take it to be—about “Crack ’em down, crack ’em down, boys!”—referring doubtless to the tomahawk of her native district. Then the rush began again. I must here mention that for the most part her transactions continued to take place in actual cash—perhaps because the amazing young female kept assuring her delighted public that she would cash their checks, but that there was “no tick,” whatever that might mean!

“Cash for cash!” she would call. “Cash for cash and fire the book-keeper!” And at this the Senator would pound the table and yell with an emphasis which, although it would doubtless befit the nature of his public duties during a period of national crisis, was scarcely of a sufficiently dignified quality to make it suitable to one of his wife’s entertainments, if you know what I mean. Altogether the degree to which the game affected the poor dear man was quite extraordinary. Nor was his enthusiasm the only surprise produced

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by this aboriginal pastime, for Mr. Willy became equally excited.

He being by nature taciturn, rugged and ruddy in appearance, and well gotten up in a breezy sort of, as I may call it, country-squire fashion, one would not have been surprised by an outburst of enthusiasm from him on, let us say, the subject of golf. His appearance warranted such a demonstration. But Mr. Willy had, so I understand, some connection with that same unfortunately crude period of the Senator's early life to which I have unwillingly, yet I trust, not too tactlessly, referred. In short, their acquirement of their knowledge of Miss Esmeralda's game must have been about simultaneous, to judge from their mutual behavior upon this occasion, and their occasional somewhat cryptic reminiscences. Mr. Willy developed a peculiar habit—unquestionably an old and abandoned one which memory renewed—of standing on one leg and swinging the other foot in a half circle through the air, to the accompani-

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ment of a very individual whistling sound made through his front teeth. These demonstrations re-occurred with great regularity and increasing vehemence whenever he made a play. Whether he won or lost never altered the vehemence of the whistle or the swing of the boot.

To say that the crowd was delighted by the spectacle of these two prominent persons so openly enjoying themselves, is merely a mild indication of what actually occurred. As a matter of fact, the other gamblers (I can call them by no other word) became almost as wild as the three leading lights of this "social" gathering. The noise was growing quite deafening and, greatest calamity of all, those wretched newspaper people and photographers instead of keeping their proper distance, actually joined the game; one quite impossible little chap in an obviously ready-made suit of tweeds, almost outdid the Senator himself in shouting and pounding. The spirit of the West was becoming, as

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I may say, rampant. I can truthfully assert that had the men drawn revolvers and begun firing into the air I would have been in no whit surprised. It was just as things got to this appalling state that poor dear Mrs. DeWynt's almost Amazonian, if I may respectfully so term it, social leadership, reasserted itself in full force. Never, never, in all the time I have known her has it failed to do so at any tremendously critical time. Completely recovering her usual manner by a stupendous effort of will, she simply ordered tea, thereby automatically bringing her foredoomed garden party to its close.

This time there was no failure. For once tea appears, it would, of course, be impossible for any guest to continue playing. And although it was barely four o'clock and so, under ordinary conditions far too early to serve it, still, it more than served its purpose, and the crowd at the long table began to disperse. Of course, it is possible that Miss Esmeralda's unexpected willingness to,

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as she called it, "quit" may have had something to do with the readiness with which her audience left *her* board for *ours* (to crack a mild joke, if you know what I mean!). Far from opposing their desertion she even rather encouraged it.

"I guess this crowd is pretty thoroughly cleaned out, anyway!" she remarked. "Go along and get your ice-cream, folks! No thanks, nothing for me; I'll just count up now!"

During the tea which followed and which my dear patroness succeeded in making as dull and consequently as brief as possible, I had perforce to pass the long table where Miss Esmeralda still sat surrounded by a persistent group of admirers, including the newspaper men. And as I did so I fairly chilled with horror at sight of the piles of money that she was engaged in assorting; bills, silver, checks, and even a little gold. And that outrageous young woman was coolly straightening it out and making notes concerning it, with

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Captain Tugwell's note-book and pencil. She was even chatting in a friendly fashion with the people about her. I hurried by as fast as possible, for the sight somehow wounded my sensibilities to the quick.

I have ever observed that when a situation reaches a point where endurance of it no longer seems possible a change occurs, and usually for the better. I dare say Nature or something like that takes care of the matter, if you know what I mean. Like blondes marrying brunettes, and rain after a dry spell and all that sort of thing. And so it was in this instance. We were about at the end of our tether, Mrs. DeWynt and I, before the relief came however.

The guests having finished their uncomfortable tea at length began to depart, my dear lady by this time having reached such a pitch of, as I may call it, nervous strain, that she scarcely heeded their farewells. Indeed, she once or twice simply turned her back upon some of the outsiders when they tried to say

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good-by. And then finally there was left only a little group of ourselves—the Senator, Mr. Willy and Captain Tugwell, all deeply absorbed in helping Miss Esmeralda at her task. Mrs. Ted, Mrs. Langdon and, of course, St. Johns and Miss Marjorie remained to see the thing out.

Preparing for the inevitable and wishing to be in an advantageous position, my dear patroness ensconced herself in a large chair and surrounded herself with her little group of loyal ones. She was evidently determined that the girl should come to her and so indeed it happened. After a very few moments Miss Esmeralda arose and approached her aunt, bearing a cake-basket full of money, and backed up in the rear by the Senator, Mr. Willy and Captain Tugwell. Mrs. DeWynt eyed the oncoming procession unsmilingly. But Miss Esmeralda was plainly elated and when she was in such a mood I assure you there was something contagious about

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her even if one were trying to stand on one's dignity.

“Look, Aunt Sally!” she exclaimed. “Pretty good pickings! We make it three thousand dollars. This village must represent a lot of hard money!”

Miss Esmeralda's announcement was electrifying. St. Johns gave a long whistle, and the other women took on a rigid expression. All but my dear lady, who half rose from her seat and then sank back again.

“Three thousand dollars!” she said. “But my dear child! And what on earth are you going to do with all that money?”

A dead silence followed the question. I think the expression on Miss Esmeralda's face was the cause of it. For once it was deadly serious, and she lost all her color, becoming very white, as though she had been suddenly and badly frightened. But she was not frightened: her eyes showed that. She was merely extremely angry, and holding on to her temper in, as I must say,

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the very best of form. Her voice was very quiet, yet distinctly disconcerting.

“Aunt Sally,” said she slowly, “every person on this terrace was playing for money—even at the bridge tables. Do you mean to tell me they expected to keep their winnings?”

“Now, Esmeralda——” began Mrs. DeWynt. But that stern, young figure would not allow her aunt to go on.

“I was playing for the Red Cross,” said Miss Esmeralda. “I thought the others were too. I see by your face that I was wrong. Well, there’s no question about where my money goes!”

In silence still we watched her count off a certain number of bills which she retained. Then she set her basketful of assorted wealth upon the arm of her aunt’s chair.

“There you are—all but sixty dollars,” said she. “With the three hundred you took in at the gate, the boys ‘over there’ will get quite a lot of help.”

“And for what, may I ask, are you

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retaining that sixty dollars?" inquired Mrs. DeWynt.

Miss Esmeralda laughed a little, although not very gaily.

"This member of the Red Cross pays expenses first!" she said, pointing to herself. "And that sixty was lent me by Captain Tugwell to stake the bank."

With that she turned to hand him the money. But he was gone—vanished utterly!

"Well, never mind," said Miss Esmeralda, stuffing the money in her belt. "I'll give it to him next time I see him."

And then, to the infinite relief of all of us, Hoskins appeared with the tray of before-dressing cocktails. What marvelous inventions food and drink are, and how many a difficult situation have they not solved!

I do not as a rule partake of alcoholic stimulants, so I left the party at this juncture to complete my duties for the day, as they were by no means finished. And as I entered the long drawing-

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room, I discovered the missing Captain Tugwell.

Now from the moment of his introduction to us I claimed that he was of very inferior mentality, and what I now saw convinced me that he was perhaps even feeble-minded. For there was no one in the room—mind you, absolutely no one and yet the man was laughing, conversing and making gestures. On my word of honor! He was leaning against the sofa, his back toward me and he was alternately beating the air with his hands and slapping his knees with them, his shoulders shaking with mirth and in a whisper he kept saying over and over: “Rippin’! Simply rippin’! Oh, I say *really!* It’s too much!” And a lot more mere gibberish like that. On my word of honor!

CHAPTER VII

THE day following was Sunday, and rainy. The senator and Mr. Willy, of the President's Purchasing Board, stayed over, expecting to play golf in the morning. Captain Tugwell was carried off bodily, before eleven, by Mrs. Langdon, Marjorie and the inevitable St. Johns, and Mrs. DeWynt kept her bed, worn out by the fatigues of the preceding night. When once my menus for the following day were made up, I wandered downstairs, desolated, wondering where Miss Esmeralda was. I had not long to ponder the question, for from the library came roars and bellows of laughter. Looking in through the portières I beheld a most unwonted sight.

The center of the room was occupied, as you may have supposed, by the object of my search, her bright head

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gleaming in the place of, as I may say, sunlight, and seeming a very acceptable substitute at that. In her lap was that terrible dog of hers, and on either side sat the senator and Mr. Willy, both convulsed with amusement at some story she had just been telling. I say the sight was unprecedented, because, so far as I am aware, this was the first time Mr. Willy had been known to laugh; and the Senator, when the elements interfere with his golf, is not generally approachable—to put it mildly.

“ So these two boys, who had been so unjustly run out of town,” Esmeralda concluded, “ came back early one day and broke into the bank. No one knew they were there, and folks began coming in to deposit money, and what not. As each came in the doorway, Charlie would hold 'em up, frisk 'em and stand 'em in line. By noon all the best citizens were present, standing in a row. But that didn't satisfy the boys. They waited until the time lock opened at two o'clock, emptied the vault, put the best

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citizens in, locked it up and went quietly away."

When the laughter subsided Mr. Willy put a question.

"You do really seem to know the West!" he exclaimed. "That accounts for your remarkable knowledge of horses the other night, eh?"

"My father raises them," said Esmeralda. "We have about six hundred head."

"Well! Well!" said Willy. "So your father is C. E. Sprunt, eh? Ah! Hum! And this is your first visit East?"

"Yes," said Esmeralda sadly. "I—I came to do war work; but I am apparently good for nothing! I can't knit or sew or cook; and the bandages I rolled were terrible! Somehow, I just haven't the feeling for nursing."

"Ah! Hum!" said Mr. Willy again. "There must be something such a clever girl can do. You'd like to do something?"

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“If I only knew how!” Esmeralda exclaimed.

I turned away, not caring to hear more. Somehow, no matter what the conversation, if Miss Esmeralda was in it, it eventually came back to the war, and why somebody or other who had no concern in it wasn't doing some beastly thing like volunteering! Why, I even once caught her talking that way to Hoskins, the butler, a man with a wife! That terribly healthy appetite of hers had evidently driven her to ask him for supplementary food, which she was sharing with her animal, Jeff, and at the same time engaging Hoskins in an argument as to why he should go to France.

“I'm sure Aunt Sally will keep Mrs. Hoskins on as maid,” she was assuring him. “That'll make her independent of you. And the khaki is much more becoming than your striped coat.”

Really, I hardly know what Hoskins would have answered—he seemed totally at a loss—if I had not come to the

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rescue by carrying her off. So you can see that this type of conversation was beginning to make me distinctly nervous.

At luncheon time Captain Tugwell returned, and with him were Marjorie and Mrs. Langdon, with her attendant dancer as usual. They had failed to keep the captain to luncheon and so had invited themselves over. At the meal the senator made what seemed a perfectly harmless announcement.

"I have had the horses sent down from Lenox," he said. "They came last night. Stood the trip well, Jackson tells me. We'll ride this week."

"Good enough!" exclaimed the captain. "I've been promised a mount. And you'll ride, of course, Miss Sprunt?"

"Marjorie rides beautifully," put in Mrs. DeWynt before Esmeralda could answer. "And I will go with you myself. The senator won't be back till Wednesday; we will go to-morrow."

"Oh, I just think horses are ducky!" cried Marjorie.

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“ May I come, Aunt Sally? ” asked Esmeralda.

“ Of course you’ll come! ” exclaimed the captain.

But next morning I was fated to witness a somewhat painful interview between Miss Esmeralda and Mrs. DeWynt. The horses had been ordered at ten, and at a quarter before that hour Miss Esmeralda came downstairs arrayed in one of her quaint Western costumes. She wore a divided skirt of khaki; heavy boots of, I presume, a cow design—I have referred to them before; and a sombrero.

About her waist was a gay sash and on her hands fringed gauntlets. I myself do not indulge in equestrian sports, and so was no real party to the scene; but I was there to see them off, and I can assure you that her costume was in marked contrast to the correct garb which Mrs. DeWynt had donned for the occasion. Mrs. DeWynt, though stout, is always correct. At sight of

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Esmeralda's costume she held up her hands in horror.

"But, my dear child;" she exclaimed. "You told me you had proper riding clothes!"

"Aren't these all right?" asked Esmeralda wistfully. "I've always worn them."

"But not in Long Hampton!" said her aunt decisively. "They would never do!" Then she had an inspiration. "Besides," she added, "I'm afraid there is no horse for you. Jennifer, the mare you were to have had, is lame, and there is only one which nobody in the family has yet ridden. He's too wild."

"I'll gentle him for you!" said Esmeralda, her face, which had registered chagrin, brightening visibly at the idea.

"I couldn't dream of permitting it!" exclaimed her aunt. "Especially in those clothes! Never, my dear!"

"But please tell me what is wrong with my clothes," begged Esmeralda. "I really would like to suit you, aunt."

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“Well, everyone wears breeches here!” Mrs. DeWynt exclaimed. “I’ll see that a proper habit is ordered for you. Meantime you must do as I say.”

Very, very regretfully Esmeralda submitted, and went upstairs. She could not endure to see them start. I watched them myself, though without envy; in fact, I was rejoiced, for, if opportunity offered, I was determined to see Miss Esmeralda alone and explain my position about not having enlisted. The subject still rankled, in view of the unfortunate coloring Mrs. DeWynt had given to my retreat in that downtown café. And so it was that when, a few moments after the equestrians’ departure, I heard her approach my study door, I was filled with most pleasurable sensations. I straightened my tie.

“Come in!” said I before she had fairly knocked.

And Esmeralda came in, that Jeff dog at her heels. She had not changed her clothes; and from her manner I saw at once that I was not the object of her

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search, but only a medium to some other end.

“Penny!” said she excitedly. “I’m going riding—and you are going to help me to!”

“But—but——” I began to protest.

“But me no buts!” said Esmeralda, running her fingers through her red hair and twitching that disconcerting eyebrow at me. “But me no buts! I’m going mad for lack of exercise in this funny village that looks like the country and acts like the city.”

“But your aunt has said——” I tried to edge in.

She waved me to silence.

“I know she has said!” cried Esmeralda. “That’s why I’m here! Of course, I want to please Aunt Sally, if possible; and if she thinks its proper for me to wear breeches instead of skirts, and won’t let me ride without them—why, I’ll wear them; that’s all. And you’ll have to lend me some!”

“I! I!” I gasped. “Never, Miss

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Esmeralda! Besides, there isn't any horse for you this morning."

"You'll help me saddle the new one," said Esmeralda firmly.

I rose in alarm.

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" I exclaimed. "Your aunt——"

Esmeralda treated me to a long stare.

"So you won't, eh?" said she coldly. "Very well, I'll have to do without you. Humph! I'm beginning to be glad you are not in the army—a lot of help you'd be if you were!"

And with that she turned on her heel and left the room, the dog-creature following; and, thoroughly shaken, I sat down, endeavoring to compose myself.

It was not over twenty minutes later that I heard her descending the stairs. I knew who it was by the little tune she was singing—something about "Ten thousand cattle straying"—a favorite with her. Hearing this, I rushed out to remonstrate with her while there was yet time. But from the moment I entered

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the hall I realized that it was already too late.

We have an impressive stairway at The Beeches, and many an impressive procession has passed up and down it when we were entertaining. Yet never have I felt as I did on beholding Esmeralda descending on this occasion. Neither, I am sure, did Hoskins, who chanced at the moment to be in the hall, and who, like myself, stood transfixed at the sight. For Miss Esmeralda had found and donned a pair of breeches—tucked them into the cow boots, and, accompanied by the Jeff-dog, was serenely coming down so clad; and the breeches were undeniably and unmistakably Captain Tugwell's!

I think I have mentioned those tweeds of his—they being of a loud and easily recognizable check, and most offensive to my more refined taste. And here they were, blatant, as I may say, upon Miss Esmeralda's shapely person!

What to do about it, though! Natur-

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ally I felt a certain overwhelming delicacy about referring to the accouterments of her nether limbs. And neither could I permit her to appear in public in those garments. I was, indeed, in a quandary. Everyone who beheld those trousers would most certainly know to whom they belonged. Yet she could not well be requested to remove them. There was but one thing to do—dissuade her from riding. I determined to try that. Just as I reached this decision Miss Esmeralda espied me; and, breaking off her song, she hailed me as genially as if she had not just left me in anger.

“Hello, Penny!” she said. “Come on out and see me off, you old copper cent!”

“Miss Sprunt,” I replied stiffly, “I trust you do not really intend to go out in—to go out on that new horse; you do not seem to be aware of the danger. Why, even Captain Tugwell, an English sportsman, did not care to make the attempt!”

“Didn’t he, though?” said she

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lightly, apparently at ease with the world now that her object seemed likely of attainment. "Didn't he? Well perhaps we won't try an English saddle; but we can and will try an army saddle, eh? Come along, you rough thing!"

And, catching me by the arm, she compelled me to race the length of the hall and out across the lawn to the stables with her, the Jeff-dog running with us, barking and playfully snapping in the most disconcerting manner. Nevertheless, I confess I rather enjoyed it.

At the stable we found Thomas, the fellow who had come down with the horses, and a stable boy. Esmeralda let go my arm and told them what she wanted. As they were new to the place, they could not, I am glad to say, recognize the tweeds; but at the request for the Kaiser they were astonished enough.

"But we haven't even been able to saddle him, miss!" said Thomas. "The only one as can do that is Jackson, miss, and he's out with the party, ridin'; and he do give even 'im a heap of trouble."

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Esmeralda's eyes gleamed. "Good!" she said. "Then he ought to be a lot of fun. Where is he?"

"This way, please, miss," said Thomas; and we followed him into the stables.

The groom led the way to a box stall where a beautiful gray hunter was moving about in a restless fashion.

"You can't 'ave a 'alter on 'im, miss," said the groom; "so we 'as 'im in the box stall. I 'ave to carry 'is water in to 'im, I do; for we can't well lead 'im out."

"Well, get me a rope and I'll snare him, then," replied Esmeralda, not in the least disconcerted by this alarming news.

The man tried hard not to stare at the order, but obeyed, unsmiling.

Evidently he, even before myself, appreciated the seriousness of her undertaking. Esmeralda took the rope, examined it, and, finding it satisfactory, addressed the attentive groom.

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“ Hold this for me,” she said, giving him an end.

She then made a curious knot in the thing, so formed that, though it made a noose, the rope was not held by it, but slipped through easily. With this in hand she approached the stall and, over the top, threw her lariat with amazing swiftness and surety; and the next instant, to the equal astonishment of all of us, including the horse, she had the thing about his neck. With a second deft little motion she had twisted the loop about his nose, and turned to Thomas, laughing.

“ There you have a halter, eh— what?” she remarked.

Then she started to lead the Kaiser toward the gate; but the horse reared back.

“ There goes 'is tricks!” cried the groom. “ 'E's a narsty one, 'e is! P'raps you'd rather saddle 'im in 'ere!” Evidently he hoped she was getting tired of the job; and he was willing enough, for his part, to give it up.

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“No; we’ll take him outside,” said Esmeralda, considering. “Inside, he might jump up and bump his head.”

Then, somehow or other, we got him outside—that is to say, Miss Esmeralda did. And as soon as he was in the yard he made a brave dash for liberty, dragging Miss Esmeralda along with him for several feet, until Thomas and the stable boy sprang to his head and brought him to a tremulous standstill. The creature stood there snorting, and Esmeralda called to the grooms to take hold of the rope above her hold. Wonderingly they did so; and then she, still keeping an end in her hand, went over to a strong post, which formed a corner of the fence and looped the rope to it.

“Now let go, and shoo him over to me!” she cried.

I do assure you my heart stood still as they obeyed. It was a terrifying sight, the approach of that great gray animal; but as fast as he came Esmeralda calmly looped the slack round the post, until the horse was finally close to

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the fence. In coming up the loop had slipped from round his nose, but that about his neck held tight as he pulled back on it.

“Isn’t he a nice little horsey?” said Esmeralda with a light in her eye that told me this was her first moment of real enjoyment since she had been in our midst.

By this time the animal’s eyes had begun to pop out, as his wind was slowly cut off by his own straining. All at once he gave a sudden lunge toward the fence, came up against it hard, and then, almost as abruptly, drew off, perfectly docile, and standing meek and quiet.

Esmeralda gave the rope a slack and drew nearer. I trembled as I saw her little hand go out in a caress of his great flank. Soon she was murmuring to him like a mother to her babe, her hand creeping toward his head in a succession of little love pats.

“Whoa, horsey!” said she, at length patting him on the nose. He snorted, but permitted the caress.

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“Bring the saddle now,” cried she, without stopping in her attentions to the horse.

Thomas obeyed with alacrity. He approached the animal gingerly and was about to put the saddle on.

“No—no!” said Esmeralda. “Give me the blanket first.”

She took it from the man. The horse winced from it; so Miss Esmeralda offered it for his close personal inspection, permitting him to smell it. This seemed to reconcile him somewhat; and he only trembled when she cautiously slipped it upon his shoulder, and then slid it back into place.

She repeated this performance with the saddle. Once it was on she bumped the stirrups gently against his sides, patting him reassuringly meantime. Then with a cautious foot she reached under the creature, caught the girth with her toe, and, with many a precautionary caress, had the thing cinched!

At this point Thomas, who had hith-

EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS

erto kept his distance, actually succeeded in bridling the Kaiser.

“ You ’ave a way with ’orses, miss! ” said he respectfully.

“ So have you, ” said she with the enthusiasm of success. “ You ought to be exercising it in the army. The Allies need your sort! ”

At that instant my glasses dropped off, and when I recovered them I trembled indeed, for Miss Esmeralda was in the saddle.

“ Which way did they go? ” she asked, addressing me for the first time since our arrival at the stables.

“ To East Hampton, ” I responded gloomily.

“ Which way is East Hampton? ” she cried.

I pointed dumbly. She nodded. The horse described an arc with his forefeet, and she was off a mere streak of black and white.

CHAPTER VIII

I stood limp and shaken against the door frame until she was out of sight, both the stable boy and Thomas watching with me. Then the latter approached me with a grave face.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said he; “but I do think perhaps I’d better give notice. What she said about my bein’ of more use over in France—I do know ’orses, if I s’y so myself. And when a young lidy like that arsks when is yer goin’, it mykes a chap think! So, if you please, sir——”

“All right, Thomas!” I assented, feeling unable to protest. And, anyway, one couldn’t very well protest.

Then, feeling completely defeated, I returned to the house. Her going off like that in the face of dear Mrs. DeWynt’s express orders was bad enough, but the resigning of Thomas, so long

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our faithful undergroom, was rather the last straw! It was my thankless task to engage the servants, and at the rate we were going the household seemed likely to be entirely depleted; for I have forgotten to mention that she had somehow discovered that the senator's valet was of conscription age and had not registered—this before she was with us a week!

But, though the impending servant question was, I admit, a worry, the thought of Esmeralda's tearing off in that mad way was the really depressing thing. Not that I need have troubled except as to what Mrs. DeWynt would and, in point of fact, did say, as I subsequently learned. Of course I was not an eyewitness to what follows; but I have pinned it together from the somewhat emotional and disjointed account my dear patroness gave me, and the picture I herewith submit is, I trust, veracious.

It would seem that the party had started out advantageously enough.

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cheeks tingle. That this outrageous, uncouth girl should deliberately cause her such mortification and embarrassment! And that wasn't all!

Esmeralda's mount seemed immediately to impart the strangest notions to the other animals. He had a way of prancing diagonally, of rearing, or backing, of displaying an interest in sidehills and running water, which immediately affected his fellows. Even Daisy, Mrs. DeWynt's good old white pony, appeared to shed her years and frisked in a disconcerting manner. Several times Mrs. DeWynt reproved her niece sharply for the way in which she allowed the Kaiser to act, until she was almost obliged to conclude that the girl was doing it on purpose to show her circus-rider tricks. She rode in the worst possible form—not even posting the trot; but, somehow, nothing the horse did annoyed her.

But the same could not be said of the others. For one thing, the Kaiser being very fresh the other horses would insist

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upon trying to keep up with him. This made pleasant conversation impractical and horsemanship imperative. Then, that common Jeff-dog kept running in and out among the horses' feet until poor dear Mrs. DeWynt felt ready to scream—did, indeed.

“Esmeralda Sprunt, make that vile dog keep from under the horses' feet!” she commanded; not wisely, however.

“Very well, Aunt Sally,” said Esmeralda. She drew the Kaiser off a bit and gave a call. On the instant the Jeff-dog crouched and sprang up on her pommel! A most amazing performance; but that was nothing to what followed. The Kaiser, infuriated at this invasion, began a series of gymnastic performances known in the wilds, I believe, as bucking. I understand the action is a most terrifying one to behold and has a very demoralizing influence on other horses that chance to be in the immediate neighborhood. And that is what occurred upon this occasion. The Kaiser held the center of the road— and

ESMERALDA

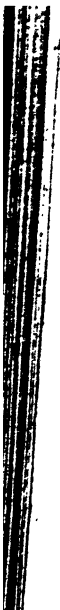
a large proportion of it either way. And before his demonstration the other horses fled as shavings in a windstorm—scattering to the right and left, over fences, through underbrush, surmounting anything, crossing anything, to be out of the way of the big gray devil and his rage.

Daisy, poor dear Mrs. DeWynt's mount, insisted upon climbing up a sidehill into a cow pasture full of cows, and this at a gait which necessitated the poor lady's grasping her mane with both hands, in a fainting state of terror, owing to the fact that she lost both stirrups at the first plunge up the embankment. And she is not fond of cows; indeed, they fill her with profound distrust—yet Daisy ruthlessly carried her into their very midst.

Mrs. Langdon's horse took her midstream in a shallow but noisy brook, and then started wading up, despite her most violent protests. Marjorie was cantering away up the road, lost in a cloud of dust; and after her went St.

POOR DEAR MRS. DE WYNT IS NOT FOND OF COWS





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Johns, going like the wind. One of the grooms, carried irresistibly into a field, was endeavoring to dissuade his animal from climbing a haystack; while round and round the center of disturbance circled the second groom and Captain Tugwell, each with his mount fairly well in hand, but shouting directions and advice to Esmeralda.

The struggle between girl and horse did not actually take more than five minutes, though my dear patroness assured me that to her, clinging to Daisy there amid those dreadful cows, it seemed interminable. Then all at once the big gray bolted down the road, going at a most alarming pace, but at least on four feet once more; and next, after a breathless moment or two, Esmeralda turned him, and came trotting gently back. Captain Tugwell rode up at once, brimming with congratulations.

“He almost had me going for a minute,” said Esmeralda; “but I guess he knows who’s boss now. After I ride him a few times more he’ll be safe for democracy, all right!”

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Captain Tugwell and the grooms were so taken up with this spectacular performance that Mrs. DeWynt actually had to call out before they realized her plight and went to her assistance. Once they had got her off of Daisy and safely out from amid the cows, nothing on earth would induce her to mount again.

“Send for the car!” she commanded, seated on a stone and leaning heavily against Captain Tugwell, while the others crowded solicitously about her. “Send for the car! I am not a circus rider, and I refuse to remain in this Wild West Show another instant! This is not the sort of riding that is done!”

I say that all were crowding round—that is, all save Esmeralda; for such was the amazing fact. That young lady, once assured that her aunt had received no physical injury, set off to look for her Jeff-dog, whom she presently discovered a short way back on the road with a broken paw. The creature had been injured when thrown from the

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gray, and now Esmeralda brought him up, actually expecting compassion for the cause of all the trouble!

“Oh, Aunt Sally,” said Esmeralda, “I’m so glad you are going home in the car. You can take poor little Jeff; he’s broken his paw.”

Mrs. DeWynt glared at her niece in righteous indignation.

“Ride with that beast!” she exclaimed. “Never!”

Esmeralda said nothing; but her cheeks burned as she turned away.

“I’ll carry him for you,” said Captain Tugwell quietly. “Better not try him on the gray again to-day—and this old plug I’m on won’t mind.”

He took the dog over, holding him with care; and presently the two—Esmeralda and he—trotted off together, the gray as gentle as a lamb outwardly, but, I suspect, with a suppressed gleam in his eye.

“And I assure you, Allie,” concluded Mrs. DeWynt—“I assure you she never even inquired whether I had sustained any nervous shock!”

CHAPTER IX

WHEN unwillingly the same roof shelters two women of very opposite temperaments for any length of time, one can always feel the gathering of an inevitable rupture—a tenseness of atmosphere, as before a thunder and lightning storm; a sort of rolling up of clouds—if you know what I mean; silent at first, then a few warning mutterings; and then, at last, rather to the relief of everyone, comes the interview in which they say what they really think of each other. Ever since Esmeralda's entrance into our so-different world I had felt this crisis impending—had sensed its inevitability, while the, as I may say, humidity increased. Just what would stand revealed when the clouds parted no one could foretell; but at tea time on the afternoon of the momentous ride I saw that things were undoubtedly coming to a head.

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Dear Mrs. DeWynt had kept to her room over the luncheon period, and when she reappeared in the afternoon and sent for me, her frame of mind had not been softened by what it had dwelt upon. Nor was it further eased by the news I was obliged to break to her. Hoskins, our butler, had given warning. He had, so he said, been thinking over Miss Esmeralda's suggestion that the trenches were preferable to his present life, provided Mrs. DeWynt would keep his wife on as maid; and he had determined to exchange our house livery for khaki. That phrase of hers about its being a more becoming uniform seemed to have stuck in his mind, and all I could say about his duty to his employer failed to move him.

“If we don't lick them Germans there won't really be no houses where they need a butler in a year or two, sir!” was all he answered; and so I was obliged to inform Mrs. DeWynt.

Of course, she was excessively annoyed. Hoskins had been with us five

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years: a long time as servants go now. She put down Taki and Whaki, with whom she had been solacing herself, and folded her hands in her lap.

“Allie,” she said, “send for Esmeralda. This thing has got to stop!”

I did as I was bidden; and after a few moments Esmeralda appeared, ready to go out with Mrs. Ted, whom she was expecting, and looking very chic and pretty in one of the gowns Mrs. DeWynt had given her, and a large black hat, also the gift of that generous lady. As one looked at the girl, so feminine and charming in appearance, it was most difficult to realize the sort of disturbing force she could be. Her aunt beckoned with an imperial gesture, striving hard to maintain control of herself and appear the sweet, dignified matron she knew herself to be.

“Esmeralda, my dear,” she began in honeyed accents, “I feel that it is necessary that we have a serious understanding!”

“My dear aunt,” exclaimed Esmer-



I SHUDDERED AT THEIR EXTREME POLITENESS AND AMIABILITY

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alda sweetly; "I am so glad! I quite agree with you."

I shuddered at their extreme politeness and amiability; but I did not flee the room. Something more than mere vulgar curiosity impelled me to stop. I had heard Mrs. DeWynt at it before; but I was anxious to see what Esmeralda would make of the situation.

"Now, my dear," Mrs. DeWynt took up the thread, "I sent for you to come here as my guest—to share our lives—our work——"

"War work!" put in Esmeralda.

"Yes; our humble bit," her aunt agreed. "And, though I appreciate that your early training, for which you are not to blame, has, not perhaps fitted you for what we do, I must insist that, since you refuse to learn, you shall at least conform to our way of living."

"But, dear Aunt Sally," replied Esmeralda, "you yourself find I'm not able to knit, or roll bandages, or——"

"I confess I am disappointed in your lack of enthusiasm for the womanly

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things I and my friends are doing," admitted Mrs. DeWynt, "and that I do not care for the tone in which you refer to them. I think it most unmannerly!"

"And I don't think much of the things you do," said Esmeralda with some asperity. "I don't care to learn them, because I don't think they matter a damn!"

"Esmeralda!" cried her aunt. "I forbid you to use such language!"

"Forbid!" said Esmeralda.

"Yes!" said Mrs. DeWynt angrily. "And, my dear niece, while you are here, I must insist that you try to make yourself more like us, and that you endeavor to be useful to me in my war work. Further, I demand that you cease interfering with my servants. I am your aunt, and I am the proper authority as to what you shall and shall not do!"

"You may be my aunt," said Esmeralda slowly; "but you mustn't blame me for that. It's not my fault!"

"Because of your youth and lack of

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breeding," said Mrs. DeWynt, trembling, "I will overlook that atrocious remark. But we must understand each other clearly. Do I gather that you refuse to comply with my wishes?"

"Aunt Sally," replied Esmeralda, "what about my end of this? Haven't I been cheated, eh?"

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. DeWynt, holding herself in with a mighty effort.

"Well, you want us to have a clear understanding," replied her niece; "and it's pretty plain you're not satisfied with me. Well," her voice grew stronger as she spoke — not loud, but intense — "well, I'm not satisfied, either. I've been cheated. You offered me the chance to do something for my country — you, a rich, influential and powerful woman, who ought to be able to do anything! Of course, I accepted; jumped at the chance. And when I get here, what do I find? A crowd of women with a dozen menservants apiece who won't eat the Hoover foodstuffs! And

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these ladies, instead of firing their help and getting down to brass tacks, knit sweaters! Good heavens! Do you expect to lick the Germans with sweaters? Why don't you send men instead of worsted things? Why don't you save? Why don't you organize for something real? Where's your sacrifice? You make me ashamed, you are so futile with your great luxurious houses, your extravagant amusements, your costly clothes!"

"You're wearing some of those clothes at this minute!" put in her aunt, rising to her feet. "Ungrateful girl! After all I've done for you!"

Esmeralda tore off the great black hat and tossed it on the table in front of her aunt.

"There!" she cried. "Take back that forty-dollar hat that I didn't want, and with the money buy some sweaters that I didn't knit."

"You are very dramatic!" sneered Mrs. DeWynt.

"War is very dramatic!" retorted

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Esmeralda. "And you people seem to think it's a comic opera! You make me wild! Why don't you stop your silly, easy pretenses and help?"

"We at least are doing something," replied Mrs. DeWynt with dignity. "It is you who are doing nothing! Why don't you do something besides criticize?"

A light came into Esmeralda's eyes. Plainly an idea had struck her. There was a little pause.

"Is that all?" Esmeralda said sweetly. "Because, Aunt Sally, if you're quite through, I'll go. And, by the way, if it's not interfering with your servants too much I might suggest that you begin knitting a small sweater for Gaston, your chef. I've just been talking to him, and I find he's going to enlist—as a cook."

And then, before we could recover from the shock, Esmeralda was gone. Distantly the front door slammed. Mrs. DeWynt and I looked at each other speechless.

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That evening Captain Tugwell did not return for dinner. Late in the afternoon came a rather incoherent telegram from him, explaining that he had been suddenly called to Washington, and saying nothing about his return. His man also received a wire, upon which he packed up and departed. This was the more annoying, as Marjorie had been invited over specially. But, just as Mrs. DeWynt was debating what to do for another dinner partner, a telephone message came in from Marjorie's father, wanting to know whether she were with us, as she had never returned from her ride. Of course, we told him she had left us before luncheon; and he hung up, saying he was going to call the police in aid.

By this time my poor dear patroness was in such a state of collapse that she hardly stirred when, a few moments later, Mrs. Langdon was on the wire asking for St. Johns. It was an amazing thing to ask, for, of course, when anybody wanted St. Johns they always

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called up Mrs. Langdon. It seemed he had not gone to luncheon at her house, as arranged and had not been seen since the dénouement of the morning's ride, when Mrs. DeWynt had started for home in her car.

I had great difficulty in assuring her that we knew nothing of the dancer's whereabouts, and when at length she hung up I returned to the drawing-room, where presently Hoskins announced dinner to a party that had become depleted to Mrs. DeWynt and myself. The Senator was still away.

"Miss Esmeralda is not down yet," said Mrs. DeWynt. "Will you see that she is called?"

Hoskins, terrifically self-conscious since he had given notice, obeyed, and we went into the dining room without waiting. In a few moments Hoskins returned to say that Miss Esmeralda was not in her room—nor, indeed, in the house, so far as any of the servants knew.

"Find out if she has telephoned,"

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said Mrs. DeWynt impatiently. Really, the girl was too trying!

By the time the kingfish was served, Hoskins was able to report authentically that Miss Esmeralda had not telephoned. Things began to look serious.

“Then telephone to Mrs. Ted Collins!” commanded Mrs. DeWynt, “and find out whether she is there.”

It was the only possible solution. And when, at the salad, Hoskins reported that not only was Miss Esmeralda not at Mrs. Ted’s, but that that lady herself had gone out of town, our alarm became acute.

“Allie,” said Mrs. DeWynt, “this is no light matter! It is impossible to guess what that extraordinary young woman may have done. I wish you would go at once to her room and see if you can find any evidence of her actions. I will stay and finish the salad while you do so.”

I rose instantly and did as I was told, waving aside Hoskins’ offer of assistance. Instinctively I felt that it was

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best to go alone; and with beating heart I climbed to that portion of the guest-room wing where I knew her chamber to be. I will not easily forget with what trepidation I approached that shrine, or how my pulses hammered as I turned the knob—after knocking and getting no response—and entered.

The room was in darkness, and excitedly I switched on the light and looked about me. At first everything seemed all right, though some confusion reigned, hats and dresses being piled about in tidy heaps, the closet door standing open, the silverware stacked upon the dressing table. In a fashion the place was very eloquent of her, like a glove worn just long enough to take the shape of the hand before being discarded.

Nowhere was there anything that I recognized as her very own, except one of her outrageous silk handkerchiefs, which had evidently been dropped by accident. I picked this up, and crossed the room to examine a slip of paper

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which had been stuck into a corner of the mirror. At once I recognized the firm handwriting—the signature was not necessary. She had written:

“Good-by, all! Sorry we don’t part better friends. I have taken only what I brought.

ESMERALDA.”

For a long moment I stood gazing fixedly at the note, something within me going very queer; I can scarcely describe the sensation, except to say that it was as if something within me awoke. Also something died. I cannot say just what. Hardly conscious of what I did I raised her handkerchief to my lips for an instant, before secreting it in an inner pocket of my coat. Then I took up the note, switched off the light, and descended to face my patroness.

I had scarcely reached the foot of the stairs when Mrs. Langdon brushed past, in a great state of excitement, and reached the drawing-room just ahead of me. There stood Mrs. De Wynt, who had evidently finished the meal without

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me. Mrs. Langdon flung herself on my dear lady's shoulder without warning and burst into sobs.

"Heavens, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. DeWynt. "What is the matter?"

"They're married!" shrieked Mrs. Langdon. "They are married!"

"Who is married?" demanded Mrs. DeWynt. "Who is married—when?"

"They are, of course—Marjorie and St. Johns!" wailed Mrs. Langdon. "This afternoon; at East Hampton! They rode over on their horses!"

Mrs. DeWynt sat down heavily.

"Marjorie!" said she. "But then she can't marry Captain Tugwell!"

"What do I care about Captain Tugwell?" cried Mrs. Langdon. "Oh! St. Johns—you faithless creature! And I gave him that very horse! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Better call up your lawyer and stop your divorce," advised Mrs. DeWynt tersely. "Then send a groom round for the horse in the morning."

Abruptly she turned to me.

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“ Well? ” she said in a high, sharp key. “ You’ve been gone long enough! Well? ”

I showed her the note. My dear Mrs. DeWynt took one look at it, and then gave forth a sound that in any lesser person could only have been called a snort.

“ You’ll be telling me next that she’s married Tugwell! ” she said furiously. And at the words I felt myself turning cold.

Of course, you all know now that she was right. We ourselves did not know it for two days afterward, when, almost simultaneously, came the announcement in the Times and an early morning visit from Mrs. Ted. That erratic lady sailed in just as Mrs. DeWynt and I were discussing the story in the newspaper; and, at first, Mrs. DeWynt was inclined to be very cross, because of Mrs. Ted’s part in the affair. But Mrs. Ted has a cajoling way with her.

“ Now, Sarah, ” she said, “ don’t be ridiculous with me! The girl came

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straight to me—and you ought to be glad, for she was perfectly capable of going alone. Then she wouldn't let me rest until I promised to go to Washington with her to see Mr. Willy. She'd have gone by herself if I hadn't; so I sacrificed a fitting at the tailor's and went—and you know how disagreeable he will be about it! And Mr. Willy has really given her a splendid job—it's buying horses for the army, you know. And she's so well fitted for it; and it's so real—just like herself!”

“I brought her East to do war work,” said Mrs. DeWynt.

“I know you did, Sarah,” purred Mrs. Ted. “And now forgive her for marrying Captain Tugwell, who followed us down. It was inevitable from the start—you know it was! Come! Admit you're rather proud of her, and glad she refused to be stuffed with sawdust, like—well, like you and me.”

But Mrs. DeWynt was adamant on the question of receiving them; and, I believe, never has given in, though many

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people blame her, because, after all, he is Lord Castlewing's cousin, you know. But Mrs. DeWynt had decided; and, after all, a little criticism can never harm her! She has never seen her niece since. I have, however.

It was in town, a month after their marriage, and I was walking down the Avenue one sunny morning, when all at once I espied them coming toward me. They seemed radiantly happy; and the Jeff-dog was with them, his limp now hardly perceptible. Before I could speak, Esmeralda had rushed up to me and seized me by both hands.

"Why, Penny!" she exclaimed. "You're in khaki! You! How splendid!"

"It's only yeomanry," I answered, blushing under her earnest gaze. "I'm still a little underweight; so I'm doing what I can while striving to acquire the requisite avoirdupois for the Regular Army."

"But how did it happen?" she cried.

"Well," said I. "All the menses-

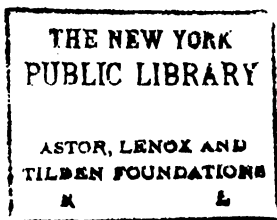
EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS

vants had enlisted, and we couldn't find any more; so Mrs. DeWynt has moved in to the Ritz to economize."

And then, at last, Miss Esmeralda gave my dear patroness her due.

"How fine!" she cried. "Now dear Aunt Sally will have more time in which to do her bit."

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